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THE NEW YORKER

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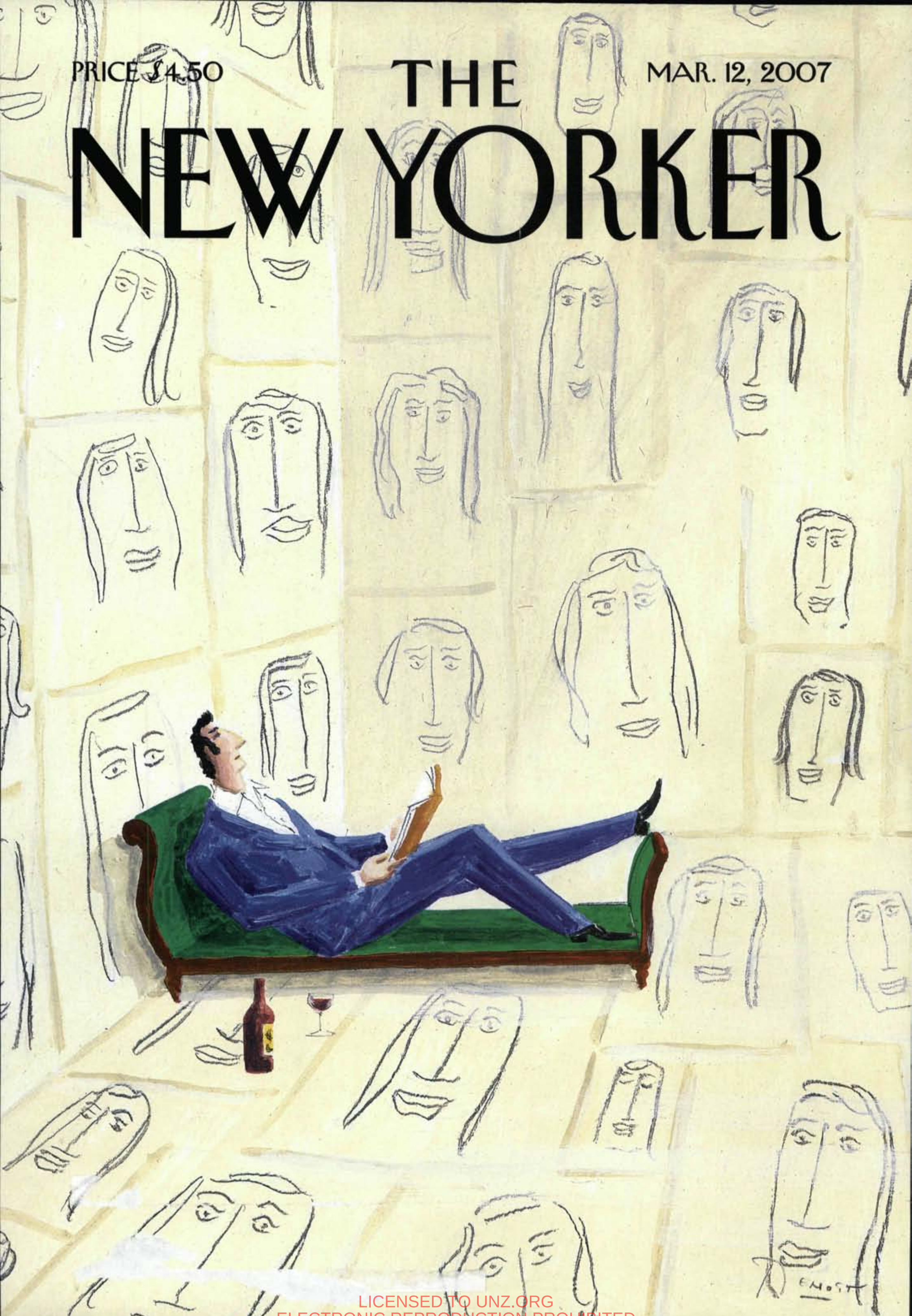

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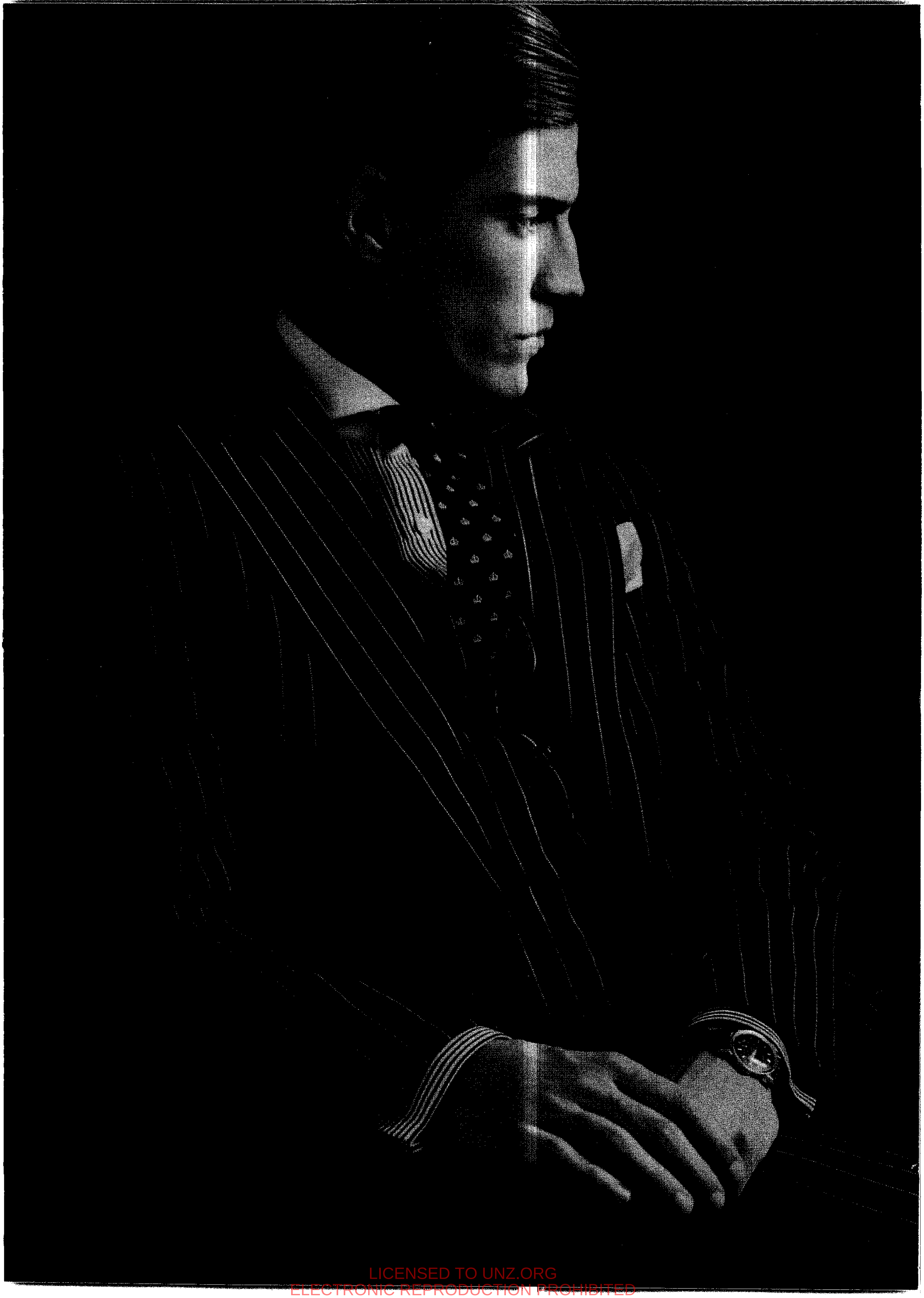

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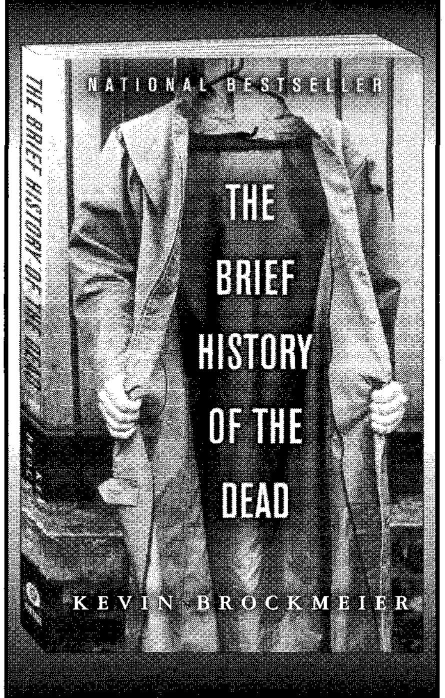

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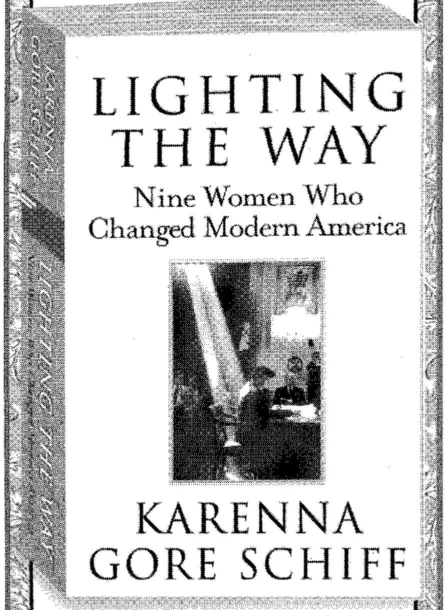

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—Walter Isaacson, author of *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life*

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CONTRIBUTORS

John McPhee ("Season on the Chalk," p. 58) has written twenty-seven books, including "Uncommon Carriers," which comes out in paperback in April.

Adam Gopnik (Comment, p. 25) is the author of "Through the Children's Gate: A Home in New York."

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Ben McGrath (The Talk of the Town, p. 28) is a staff writer.

Joan Acocella ("Swans' Way," p. 40) is the author of "Twenty-eight Artists and Two Saints," which has just been published.

Jeffrey Toobin (The Talk of the Town, p. 29) has a new book, "The Nine: Inside the Secret World of the Supreme Court," coming out in the fall.

Steve Coll ("The Unthinkable," p. 48), a staff writer, is the author of "Ghost Wars," a book about the C.I.A. and Afghanistan, for which he won a Pulitzer Prize in 2005.

Christian Wiman (Poem, p. 74) is the editor of *Poetry*. His book of essays, "Ambition and Survival: Becoming a Poet," comes out later this year.

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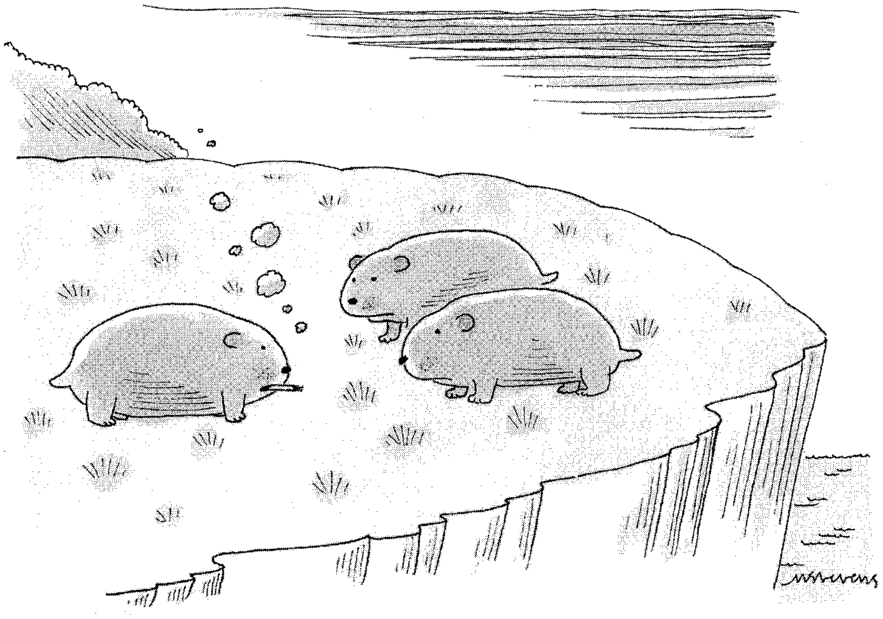
Louis Menand (Books, p. 76) teaches English at Harvard. His books include "The Metaphysical Club" and "American Studies."

Arthur Krystal (Books, p. 80) is an essayist and screenwriter. His book "The Half-Life of an American Essayist" will be published next month. ♦



"You guys go ahead. I've decided to smoke myself to death."

THE MAIL

IN DEFENSE OF PIERCE

Hendrik Hertzberg, in writing about Presidents' Day, makes light of honoring Franklin Pierce, our fourteenth President, with this holiday (Comment, February 19th & 26th). It's a common dismissal, but not necessarily a warranted one. Pierce devoted his Presidency to forestalling or preventing the Civil War, and seemed to feel that slavery would die out organically in the decades ahead. Something like this happened in Cuba, where technology and humanitarian sentiments peacefully ended slavery in the eighteen-eighties. Pierce's Presidency was a tragic but noble failure, and events in his personal life were no easier. His eleven-year-old son died just before his inauguration, and, after his single term, Pierce's close friend Nathaniel Hawthorne fell gravely ill. Pierce dropped everything to be with him, but, just as he was unable to bring peace to his nation, he was unable to save Hawthorne.
Weld Henshaw
Brunswick, Me.

ART AND COMMERCE

Dana Goodyear, in her zeal to identify the Poetry Foundation with low art, pop culture, and "consumerization," ignores the serious work we do for serious poetry ("The Moneyed Muse," February 19th & 26th). Our free online archive (five thousand poems by five hundred poets) amounts to several Norton Anthologies of great poetry. We give fellowships to aspiring young poets, several large prizes, and, for more than twenty years, have given the Ruth Lilly Prize, a lifetime-achievement award to a major American poet. *Poetry* discovers new talent and publishes essential criticism—that is why circulation has tripled. This commitment to both poets and their readers is not a new one. Harriet Monroe, the founder of *Poetry*, published the likes of Eliot, Stevens, H.D., and Marianne Moore, but she also sought to build an audience worthy of them. For years, the cover of her magazine bore a legend from Walt Whitman: "To have great poets, there must be great audiences too." The Poetry Foundation continues her work, to discover great poetry and to place it before the largest possible audience.
John Barr
President, the Poetry Foundation
Chicago, Ill.

I am bothered by the disdain for so-called accessible poetry, which seems to have become synonymous with commercial, children's, or humorous poetry. Yet W. H. Auden wrote poems of great profundity, including light verse, which incorporated rhythms of traditional ballads, popular songs, dirty limericks, and children's rhymes. In "Letter to Lord Byron," he writes, "Only on varied diet can we live./ The pious fable and the dirty story/ Share in the total literary glory." Auden is, of course, not the only poet or writer to experiment with straightforward, accessible language, forms, and themes—there was also, among others, Chaucer, Dryden, and Alexander Pope.
Greg Santos
New Haven, Conn.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

I, along with dozens of Polish and Polish-American protesters, wonder why such a respected magazine decided to publish Robert Weber's cartoon, which, with its caption implying that the name Zbigniew is bestowed only in a state of intoxication, seems to reach into the long-buried rotten box of Polish jokes (Cartoon, February 19th & 26th). Zbigniew is a beautiful Polish name of ancient proto-Slavic origin. It means, literally, a man who has managed to get rid of his anger (maybe not in this case). Mr. Weber and *The New Yorker* have stumbled badly in running such a cheap joke.
Krzysztof W. Kasprzyk
Consul General, Republic of Poland
New York City

•

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE

LEAR VS. LEAR

This year, two venerable actors are tackling King Lear. Ian McKellen will appear in Trevor Nunn's production at BAM in the fall, and Kevin Kline stars in James Lapine's staging at the Public, opening this week. He's joined by Michael Cerveris and Logan Marshall-Green. (See page 8.)

NIGHT LIFE

ONE-TWO PUNCH

Jazz at Lincoln Center fights its conservative reputation with a double bill featuring the iconoclastic free-jazz pianist Cecil Taylor, leading a trio with the somewhat unwieldy name of New AHA 3, and John Zorn's visionary Masada ensemble. (See page 12.)

ART

SPANISH CLASS

Barcelona's golden age of creative innovation, bracketed by the Barcelona Universal Exposition of 1888 and the rise of Franco's Fascist government, in 1939, is examined with an extensive show opening this week at the Met. "Barcelona and Modernity: Gaudí to Dalí" tracks the growth of radical new architecture, art, and design over that half century and the intellectual and political movements that fanned the flames. (See page 12.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

LOVERLY

The musicians of the New York Philharmonic take a week off from classical fare to back up Kelsey Grammer, Brian Dennehy, Kelli O'Hara, and other performers in a concert version of a classic musical, "My Fair Lady." The Broadway veteran Rob Fisher will conduct. (See page 18.)

MOVIES

IL RITORNO

Following the great success of last fall's retrospective of Roberto Rossellini, MOMA presents a weekend with two of the great director's classics, "Paisan," a six-part trip through the ravages of Italy at war's end, and "Voyage in Italy," starring Ingrid Bergman and George Sanders as a couple in crisis, and one rarity from his later years, "Descartes," a bio-pic never released in the U.S. (See page 22.)

A sleepover for kids at the American Museum of Natural History. Photograph by Landon Nordeman.

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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
DIAMOND LIFE

The singer and songwriter Becky Stark grew up in Maryland and spent her teen-age years training to be a classical singer and performing in musicals. When she was seventeen, Stark's vocal teacher told her that her rib cage was too small for her to work as a classical singer. Initially undeterred, Stark continued to compete in vocal competitions but eventually abandoned classical singing while attending Brown University. There, she befriended the noisy and open-minded musicians in the bands Lightning Bolt and Black Dice, who inspired her to write songs. After moving to L.A., she and three other musicians formed the band Lavender Diamond, which plays Joe's Pub March 7. Stark's music is not at all noisy—her breathy, pitch-perfect singing and calm, delicate arrangements suggest a slightly more posh version of the Carpenters or a less florid Tori Amos. Her words and topics are neither obscure nor figurative: the heart, and love, are the main subjects of the upcoming Lavender Diamond album, "Imagine Our Love," which will be released soon. Pop, once Stark's backup plan, is well suited to her clear and deliberate aesthetic.

—*Sasha Frere-Jones*

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

BE
The Tel Aviv-based group Mayumana performs a new stage spectacle, a kinetic blend of movement, theatre, and percussion. In previews. Opens March 13. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 212-505-0700.)

CHICKEN
Michael Imperioli ("The Sopranos") stars in a play by Mike Batistick, about a Bronx man who gets mixed up in illegal cockfighting. In previews. Opens March 10. (Studio Dante, 257 W. 29th St. 212-868-4444.)

CURTAINS
David Hyde Pierce plays a show-loving detective, in a new musical murder mystery by John Kander and the late Fred Ebb. In previews. (Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

DEFENDER OF THE FAITH
Stuart Carolan's drama is set in nineteen-eighties Northern Ireland, where an I.R.A. investigator is on the trail of an undercover informer. In previews. Opens March 8. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737.)

JACK GOES BOATING
LAByrinth Theatre Company presents a play by Bob Glaudini, about dating, drugs, and betrayal. The cast includes Philip Seymour Hoffman and Daphne Rubin-Vega. In previews. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

KING HEDLEY II
The third play in Signature's August Wilson series depicts a struggling Pittsburgh neighborhood in the nineteen-eighties. In previews. Opens March 11. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

KING LEAR
Kevin Kline assumes the title role in James Lapine's production, which has an original score by Stephen Sondheim and Michael Starobin. Opens March 7. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

OUR LEADING LADY
Manhattan Theatre Club presents a play by Charles Busch, about the actors who performed at Ford's Theatre on the night of Lincoln's assassination. Lynne Meadow directs. In previews. (City Center, Stage II, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

THE PIRATE QUEEN
A new musical by Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schönberg ("Les Misérables"), based on the story of the sixteenth-century Irish chieftain Grace O'Malley. In previews. (Hilton, 213 W. 42nd St. 212-307-4100.)

PRELUDE TO A KISS
A neurotic young bride and an old man share an enchanted kiss, in the Roundabout's revival of Craig Lucas's wistful drama. In previews. Opens March 8. (American Airlines, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300.)

REPUBLIC OF DREAMS
A new piece by Double Edge Theatre draws on the life, death, and surreal work of the Polish writer and artist Bruno Schulz. Opens March 8. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710.)

SOME MEN
Terrence McNally's new play follows the reminiscences of the guests at a gay wedding. Directed by Trip Cullman. In previews. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

STAY
The première of Lucy Thurber's story of a young writer who discovers an angel. Jackson Gay directs. Previews begin March 11. (Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444.)

TALK RADIO
Liev Schreiber plays the acerbic host of a Cleveland radio show, in a Broadway revival of Eric Bogosian's 1987 play. In previews. Opens March 11. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

TEA AND SYMPATHY
Keen Company revives Robert Anderson's 1953 drama, about a boarding-school student who is the subject of merciless homophobic taunts. In previews. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE YEAR OF MAGICAL THINKING
Vanessa Redgrave stars in Joan Didion's stage adaptation of her memoir, a reflection on grief and survival written after the death of her husband. David Hare directs. In previews. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

NOW PLAYING

THE ATTIC
Yoji Sakate's play is based on the Japanese social phenomenon of *hikikomori*, in which adolescents choose to live in extreme isolation. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

BFF
Anna Ziegler's tenderly chiaroscuro play about adolescence is an unmitigated pleasure. Playing best friends—Eliza and Lauren—Laura Heisler and Sasha Eden are radiantly real, capturing the easy affection and hurt of teen-age friendship. Sex and cruelty intrude on their idyll, and Lauren's eager experiments with boys drive Eliza deeper into her own shell. Structurally, the play swims back and forth through time, bridging past and present. In the latter sequences, the adult Lauren meets Seth (Jeremy Webb), a sensitive young banker, but she finds herself unable to open her heart—filled as it is with mourning for the girl she couldn't save. Ziegler's writing is rueful, frank, and fresh; her insights into young womanhood feel earned and authentic. (DR2, at 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

BILL W. AND DR. BOB
The story of Bill Wilson and Bob Smith, the stockbroker and the surgeon who founded Alcoholics Anonymous. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE CAVE DWELLERS
William Saroyan's 1957 drama is about a group of outcasts who create a second home in a run-down theatre. (Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

THE COAST OF UTOPIA, PART THREE: SALVAGE
In the third and weakest part of Tom Stoppard's epic pageant about nineteenth-century Russian intellectuals hatching revolution, Alexander Herzen (Brían F. O'Byrne), exiled in London, launches *The Bell*, a muckraking paper that taunts his motherland with censored news and radical argument, until serfdom is finally abolished, in 1861. The historical trajectory of the tale is long; Stoppard's characterization, however, is shorthand. The director, Jack O'Brien, tells the story at spectacular full throttle, and if it looks at times like a musical—for instance, in the playful, stylized way that the radical émigrés announce themselves to the audience—well, in a sense it is: Stoppard is dealing here with the music of time. (Reviewed in our issue of 3/5/07.) (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

DYING CITY
In a new play by Christopher Shinn, a woman is visited by the twin brother of her late husband, who died in Iraq. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200.)

GOODNESS
Michael Redhill's play is about a globe-trotting playwright who encounters stories of genocide wherever he goes. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 212-352-3101. Through March 11.)

HAMLET
The Wooster Group's adaptation, directed by Elizabeth LeCompte, is derived from Richard Burton's "Theatrofilm" version, from 1964. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

HOWARD KATZ
Patrick Marber's dark comedy stars Alfred Molina as a high-powered talent agent whose life is going downhill. Doug Hughes directs. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

JOURNEY'S END
R. C. Sherriff's stirring depiction of life under fire amidst the officer class during the First World War gets a first-class revival, with uniformly strong

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performances (the cast includes Hugh Dancy, Boyd Gaines, Jefferson Mays, and Stark Sands) and deft direction by David Grindley. The play's rock-solid structure and shrewd, unhectoring dialogue have an indubitable cumulative power that echoes down the ages to the futility of our present war. (Belasco, 111 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

LOS ANGELES
Adam Rapp (the author of "Red Light Winter") directs a play by Julian Sheppard, about the sleaze and glamour of Tinseltown. (Flea, 41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

MARAT/SADE
Peter Weiss's haunting play within a play is the second entry in the Classical Theatre of Harlem's season. (H.S.A. Theatre, 645 St. Nicholas Ave. 212-868-4444. Through March 11.)

MARY ROSE
At first sighting, the jejune, elusive Mary Rose Morland (Paige Howard) is clearly one of J. M. Barrie's charming embodiments of arrested development. During a trip to the Outer Hebrides, she disappears for twenty-five years, and when she finally returns to the living her family has aged beyond recognition. With the empathic power of his imagination, her now grown son, Harry (Richard Short), whose mother never actually recognizes him, nonetheless liberates her from woe and engineers a kind of salvation for them both. Tina Landau's clever and stimulating production turns Barrie's sometimes elaborate stage directions into a character, the Narrator (Keir Dullea), a trope that adds visual and intellectual strength to the delicate play. (3/5/07) (Vineyard, 108 E. 15th St. 212-353-0303.)

MY TRIP TO AL-QAEDA
The *New Yorker* staff writer Lawrence Wright performs a solo piece based on his experiences researching his book "The Looming Tower." Gregory Mosher directs. (Culture Project, 55 Mercer St. 212-352-3101.)

SEALED FOR FRESHNESS
Possibly the most humorless comedy in town. In a Midwestern suburb in 1968, five women gather for a Tupperware party, but a pleasant evening with plastic quickly degenerates into an orgy of dirty laundry. The writer-director, Doug Stone, panders to his audience every step of the way, enforcing stereotypes of both character and content. The dialogue is strictly sitcom, only smuttier. Quieter moments of revelation elicit "oohs" of the kind usually heard on a TV laugh track. And a deep misogyny is papered over with a phony feminist resolution. (New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200.)

SPALDING GRAY: STORIES LEFT TO TELL
Naked Angels stages a compilation of the late monologuist's work, arranged by Kathleen Russo (Gray's widow) and Lucy Sexton. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane. 212-307-7171.)

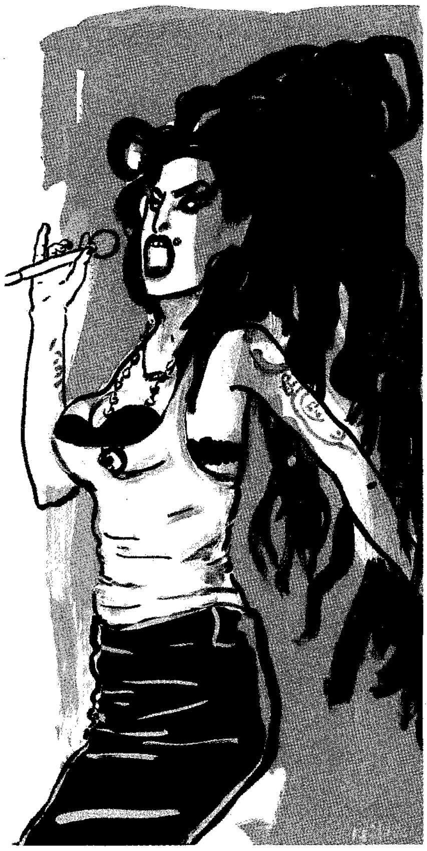
Also Playing

ALL THAT I WILL EVER BE: New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200. Through March 11. **THE APPLE TREE:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300. Through March 11. **A CHORUS LINE:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE COAST OF UTOPIA, PART ONE: VOYAGE:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **THE COAST OF UTOPIA, PART TWO: SHIPWRECK:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **COMPANY:** Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **THE FEVER:** Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through March 9. **GREY GARDENS:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **IN THE HEIGHTS:** 37 Arts, 450 W. 37th St. 212-307-4100. **THE JEW OF MALTA/THE MERCHANT OF VENICE:** Duke, 229 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Through March 11. **SPRING AWAKENING:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **TRANSLATIONS:** Biltmore, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. Through March 11. **THE VERTICAL HOUR:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. Through March 11. **THE VOYSEY INHERITANCE:** Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—March 7: **Coco Montoya** picked up the guitar late in life—he was originally a drummer—but he learned to play the blues from the master Albert Collins, and he went on to join John Mayall and the Bluesbreakers. Montoya's latest album as a leader, "Dirty Deal," was produced by the Little Feat guitarist Paul Barrere. With the local bluesman **Popa Chubby.** March 11: The eighties powerhouse **Public Enemy** delivers a night of polemical hip-hop. With their fellow Reagan-era vets, Brooklyn's **X-Clan.** March 12: A "Blues Harp Blowout" with **Mark Hummel, Charlie Musselwhite, Kim Wilson,** and others.



Amy Winehouse, at the Bowery Ballroom.

DEMETRIOS PSILLOS

BEACON THEATRE
Broadway at 74th St. (212-307-7171)—March 8-10: The Grateful Dead guitarist and vocalist **Bob Weir** stops by with his band, Ratdog.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—March 10: The **Horrors** are clearly derivative (their foppish aesthetic comes from goth bands like the Sisters of Mercy, and their haunted garage-punk style is borrowed from the Cramps and ? and the Mysterians), but who needs originality when their shambolic sound is so endearing and their train-wreck shows, often fraught with fisticuffs, have become legendary? March 13: The **Pipettes** (see the Luna Lounge) and **Amy Winehouse,** a fierce English performer whose voice combines the smoky depths of a jazz chanteuse with the heated passion of a soul singer. Winehouse's songs harken back to the classic girl-group sounds of the sixties, and she profits mightily from following the dictum to write (or in her case sing) what you know. Her social life is a tabloid-writer's dream, and a recent hit song, "Rehab," is about *not* changing her ways. Fresh from receiving a Brit Award for Best Female Solo Artist, she'll be performing songs from her latest release, "Back to Black."

BROOKLYN CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
Brooklyn College (718-951-4500)—March 10: The great South African a-cappella group **Ladysmith Black Mambazo,** perhaps best known for its work on Paul Simon's "Graceland."

GRAMERCY THEATRE
127 E. 23rd St. (212-307-7171)—March 7: Shawn Christensen, the front man of the local post-punk four-piece band **Stellastarr*,** has a resonant voice that would have met with much success in Manchester some twenty years ago. The band came together a few years ago on the campus of Pratt, in Brooklyn, and has turned out two albums since then. Taking a break from recording its third release (and looking for a new record label), it is winding up a brief tour here. March 8: **Charlie Louvin,** the seventy-nine-year-old Alabama country-music legend, recently released a new self-titled album, his first studio work in a decade. March 9: Liverpool's **Clinic,** appearing onstage in surgical masks, signal their independence from the grubby world of contemporary rock music. Their percussion-driven ballads, disguised as art punk, are completely original, thanks, in part, to their front man, Ade Blackburn, whose vocals project both yearning and contempt.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—March 7: **Lavender Diamond,** free-spirited folksters from Los Angeles. March 9: The coffeehouse veteran and blues revivalist **Chris Smither.** March 10: The singer and guitarist **Howard Fishman.**

LUNA LOUNGE
361 Metropolitan Ave., Brooklyn (718-384-7112)—March 11-12: The **Pipettes,** who formed in Brighton, England, a few years ago, are three young women (plus an all-male backing band that stays in the shadows). The stylish trio favors polka-dot dresses, synchronized dance moves, and celebratory pop crafted in the classic Phil Spector mold. Their wink-and-a-nod approach (the joyful single "School Uniform" spreads the love evenly between boys and girls) has sent them up the English charts and set the blogosphere ablaze. These are their first U.S. appearances, and, despite not having a record for sale here, they are sold out.

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—March 8: **Holly Golightly** started her musical career in the early nineties with a garage-rock group, Thee Headcoatees, but she looked to country blues and early rock for inspiration when she started releasing solo records (and she's released quite a few in the past decade). In 2003, she turned up on the White Stripes' acclaimed album "Elephant," which introduced her to a larger group of fans. Her latest project finds her working with the **Brokeoffs,** from rural Texas. March 10: The Edmonton-based ensemble **Shout Out Out Out Out** has hipsters on both sides of the border excited by its rough-edged electronic pulses. With the Norwegian rockers **120 Days.** March 12: The **Raveonettes,** a stylish Danish duo, specialize in noirish, punky pop.

REBEL
251 W. 30th St. (212-307-7171)—The **Avett Brothers** are two siblings from North Carolina, the guitarist Seth and the banjo player Scott, and a bassist, Bob Crawford. The trio sings, shouts, and plays with abandon, injecting new life into timeless roots music. They're here March 8 with songs from their forthcoming release, "Emotionalism."

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—March 7: **Badly Drawn Boy,** the talented English musician Damon Gough. With **Adem,** a British singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist (as well as the former bassist for the post-rock band Fridge), whose recent appearance at the "Welcome to Dreamland" freak-folk festival at Carnegie Hall was one of the highlights of an exceptional night. March 12: The **Good, the Bad & the Queen.** Its awful name

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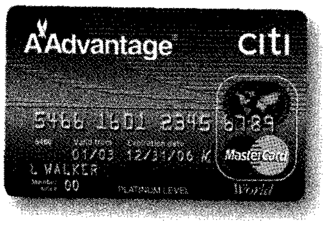

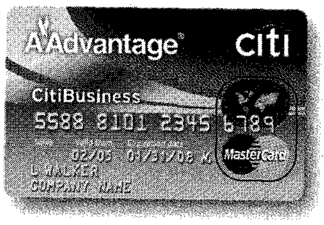

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Photographs by Francis Wolff, taken during Blue Note recording sessions in the fifties and sixties, are at the Morrison Hotel gallery. From left to right, Miles Davis in 1954, Art Blakey in 1962, and John Coltrane in 1957.

notwithstanding, this British supergroup is causing rock fans to salivate. It features Damon Albarn, of Blur and Gorillaz fame, the ex-Verve guitarist Simon Tong, the former Fela Kuti drummer Tony Allen, and Paul Simonon, of the Clash, on bass. Despite the colorful, hyperkinetic sounds of each member's past, the new band's self-titled début album is a surprisingly muted affair, presenting a fatigued portrait of modern Britain that is mawkishly dour.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—March 6-11: **Michel Legrand** celebrates his seventy-fifth birthday. France's most famous modern romantic composer (he wrote the score for "The Umbrellas of Cherbourg" and such piano-bar standards as "Theme from The Summer of '42" and "What Are You Doing the Rest of Your Life?") also has solid jazz credits (check out 1958's "Legrand Jazz" with Miles Davis, John Coltrane, and Bill Evans). He'll be backed by **Ron Carter** and **Lewis Nash**, one of the most accomplished bass-and-drum teams that money can buy.

CARLYLE HOTEL
Madison Ave. at 76th St. (212-744-1600)—The Café Carlyle, a snug, windowless enclave in the doorman district, features discreet waiters, wraparound murals, and, through March 31, the singer **Jane Monheit**, whose new album, "Surrender," concentrates on bossa nova and light-textured standards.

CARNEGIE HALL
57th St. at Seventh Ave. (212-247-7800)—March 7: **Thomas Quasthoff**, the noted German bass-baritone, performs songs from his latest release, "The Jazz Album: Watch What Happens," a collection of standards from the likes of Rodgers and Hart and Lerner and Loewe. March 9: The pianist and vocalist **Michael Feinstein** delivers a program of American standards.

"HIGHLIGHTS IN JAZZ"
The pianist and singer **Barbara Carroll** brings along such accomplished mainstream players as the clarinet virtuoso **Ken Peplowski** and the bassist **Jay Leonhart**; the West Coast-based vocalist **Paula West** weds her lustrous tones to sure and supple rhythms. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 212-220-1460. March 8.)

JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
Broadway at 60th St. (212-721-6500)—**Cecil Taylor** and **John Zorn's Masada** ensemble undoubtedly each deserve full evenings of their own, but this historic double bill in the Rose Theatre on March 9-10 shows Jazz at Lincoln Center in a favorable light, unafraid to move into more contentious musical waters. In his late seventies, Taylor can still astound with his intense keyboard explorations; he will be joined by the bassist **Henry Grimes** and the drummer **Pheeroan akLaff**. Masada calls on the leader's saxophone, **Dave Douglas's** trumpet, **Joey Baron's** drums, and **Greg Cohen's** bass to produce a group sound that owes much to free improvisation, hardcore noise, and, not insignificantly, Jewish musical strains.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—March 7-11: **Vinicius Cantuária**, a guitarist, percussionist, singer, and songwriter who hails from Brazil (he used to tour as a drummer with Caetano Veloso), performs sweet and delicate songs that evoke Gilberto Gil and Jobim.

METROPOLITAN ROOM
34 W. 22nd St. (212-206-0440)—March 13: **Annie Ross**, the female element of the celebrated vocal troupe Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross and the sharp mind behind the lyrics of the bopster anthem "Twisted."

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—**Carol Sloane**, a superior vocalist who first drew notice back in the early sixties, has put her once on-again, off-again career firmly back on track. She's here March 6-11. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Barcelona and Modernity: Gaudí to Dalí."** Opens March 7. ♦ **"Flowing Streams: Scenes from Japanese Art and Life."** Through June 3. ♦ **"Louis Comfort Tiffany and Laurelton Hall: An Artist's Country Estate."** Through May 20. ♦ **"Discovering Tutankhamun: The Photographs of Harry Burton."** Through April 29. ♦ **"One of a Kind: The Studio Craft Movement."** Through Sept. 3. ♦ **"Closed Circuit: Video and New Media at the Metropolitan."** A sampling of works from the museum's small but growing collection of video art; among the artists represented are Ann Hamilton, David Hammons, Jim Campbell, Darren Almond, and Maria Marshall. Through April 29. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Armando Reverón"** is a beguiling retrospective of a Venezuelan painter, hardly known in North America, who died in 1954 at the age of sixty-five. Through April 16. ♦ Josiah McElheny's sculptural installation imagines a utopian city of glass. Through April 9. ♦ **"Artistic Collaborations: Fifty Years at Universal Limited Art Editions."** Through May 21. ♦ **"Live/Work: Performance Into Drawing."** Works on paper that relate to performance-art pieces. Through May 7. ♦ **"Jeff Wall,"** a mid-career survey of the Canadian photographer's work. Through May 14. ♦ **"Comic Abstraction: Image Making, Image Breaking."** Through June 11. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Spanish Painting from El Greco to Picasso: Time, Truth, and Memory"** includes works by Zurbarán, Murillo, Velázquez, and Cotán, among many others. Through March 28. ♦ Work by Tacita Dean, the 2006 recipient of the Hugo Boss Prize for contemporary art, is on view through June 6. ♦ **"Family Pictures"** showcases contemporary photography and video depicting families and children; the artists include Patty Chang, Loretta Lux, Sally Mann, Gregory Crewdson, Gillian Wearing, Catherine Opie, and Thomas Struth. Through April 16. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

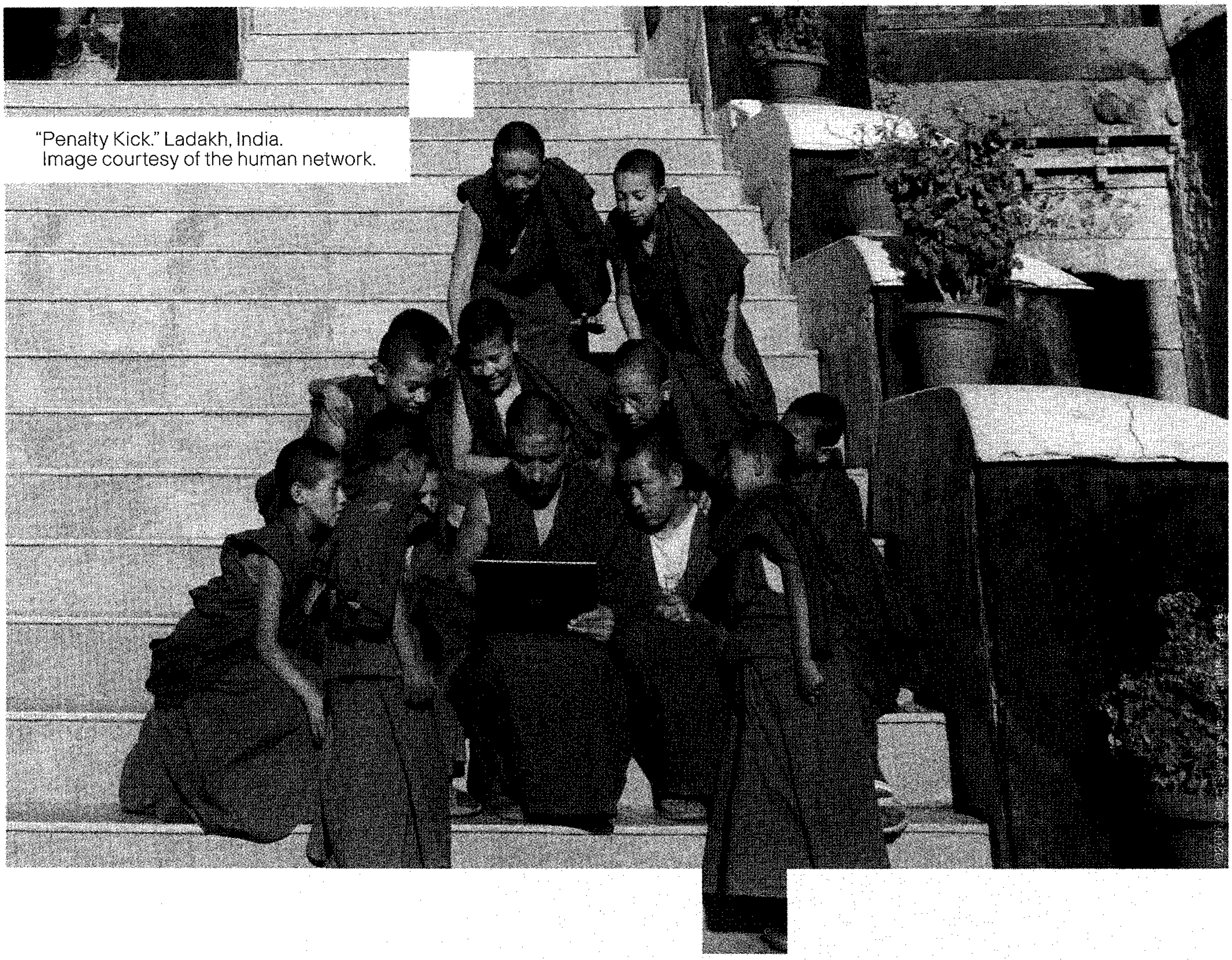
WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"Lorna Simpson,"** a mid-career survey of the artist's elegiac photographs and videos addressing issues of race and gender in American history. Through May 6. ♦ **"Photography and the Self: The Legacy of F. Holland Day."** Through March 11. ♦ Terence Koh's one-room work comprises a single four-thousand-watt bulb in a lamp pointed at viewers, a withering assault on the senses. The work is rife with metaphors, particularly of the Icarian stripe, but ultimately it's a bit short on substance. Through May 27. ♦ **"Gordon Matta-Clark,"** a retrospective of work by the artist (1943-78) best known for his building cuts. Through June 7. ♦ **"Taryn Simon: An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar."** Opens March 9. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"The Eye of the Artist: The Work of Devorah Sperber."** The title of Sperber's mezzanine installation is perhaps an oblique joke: what she's really exercising is the eye of the viewer. Sperber draws on both ancient knowledge and contemporary findings, from camera-obscura techniques to neurological studies of "top-down processing." Old Master paintings are broken down into thousands of pixels, each represented by a single spool of thread. Leonardo's "Mona Lisa," Van Eyck's "Man with a Red Turban," and Picasso's "Portrait of Gertrude Stein," assembled upside down on the wall, snap into focus when viewed through a little clear acrylic sphere. It's a nifty trick, if a bit gimmicky. Through May 6. ♦ **"Landscapes from the Age of Impressionism."** Through May 13. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Gold."** Through Aug. 19. ♦ **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter."** Through May 28. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"George Stubbs (1724-1806): A Celebration."** Through May 27. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1133 Sixth Ave., at 43rd St. (212-857-0000)—**"Martin Munkacsi: Think While You Shoot!"** Through April 29. ♦ **"Henri Cartier-Bresson's Scrap-**



"Penalty Kick." Ladakh, India.
Image courtesy of the human network.

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book: Photographs, 1932-46." Through April 29. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, and Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"Not for Sale,"** a gathering of art that, for whatever reason, its makers would not consider converting into cash, includes work by Shahzia Sikander, Luis Gispert, Maya Lin, Christo, Jasper Johns, and Stephen Shore, among others. Through April 16. ♦ Daily at 12:30 P.M, the rotating ensemble in **"Emergency Room"** (more than thirty artists, of various nationalities) unveils work responding to news from the previous twenty-four hours. Understandably, the majority of these are small works on paper, along with quickie videos and photographs. (P.S. 1 archives each day's output online.) The room looks crappy, but in a good way: the real-time energy runs high. A recent afternoon yielded a newsprint broadside on the sale of Starrett City, a mock-marketing presentation of T-shirt and baseball-cap designs for the Obama campaign ("Barack n roll!"), and a tacked-up clipping from the New York *Times*, listing service personnel newly killed in Iraq, the ages of the dead illumined in highlighter: 21, 22, 21, 21, 22, 26, 27. Through March 19. ♦ **"Katrín Sigurdardóttir: High Plane Five."** Through May 7. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

UKRAINIAN MUSEUM
222 E. 6th St. (212-228-0110)—**"Crossroads: Modernism in Ukraine, 1910-1930."** Through March 11. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11:30 to 5.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

DAN BUDNIK
Budnik's photographs of painters, sculptors, and a few fellow-photographers were made mostly in the late nineteen-fifties and sixties, when many of his subjects were just beginning their careers, and much of the pleasure one takes in his work comes from seeing Robert Rauschenberg, Lee Bontecou, Louise Bourgeois, Ellsworth Kelly, and others as they were coming into their prime. The show includes formal portraiture and more casual shots, nearly always in the artists' studios, and though there are no real revelations here it's often enough just to imagine standing alongside this privileged observer. Whether hovering over Willem de Kooning in bed or watching Jasper Johns working on a sun-struck "Numbers," Budnik was in the place to be. Through March 10. (Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. 212-794-0550.)

JOE FYFE
Several of the paintings in this show were created in Vietnam and Cambodia, where Fyfe is currently on a Fulbright Fellowship. One wants to cite the influence of Southeast Asia on this new work. But, perhaps for the better, Fyfe has stuck to his guns, creating his signature abstractions, in which the textured warp and weave of the nubbly burlap surface competes with structured layers of flat color for the viewer's attention. Works with titles like "Hoan Kiem" and "Boeng Kak" (the names come from lakes in Vietnam and Cambodia) reveal his current interests and whereabouts, even if the visuals don't. Through March 10. (Graham, 1014 Madison Ave. 212-535-5767.)

JOSEPH MILLS
Already the focus of cultlike interest, Mills fills his first New York solo show with street-scene photographs made in Washington, D.C., in the late nineteen-eighties and a group of more recent photocollages. Partly because both bodies of work are coated with a layer of varnish, they have the look of yellowing artifacts and feel oddly unmoored in time. That's especially true of the collages—Dadaist collisions of vintage *Life*-magazine images, often with a disturbingly visceral edge—but the D.C. work is also timeless and even more haunting. Like Robert Frank and Leon Levinstein, Mills conjures a rough and very personal sort of poetry from people living at society's dead end. Through March 17. (Cohen Amador, 41 E. 57th St. 212-759-6740.)

ARNOLD NEWMAN
Newman (1918-2006) is best known for his cleverly staged portraits of artists, writers, statesmen, and other celebrated sitters, several autographed examples of which are included here. But the bulk of the show is devoted to black-and-white work made between 1938 and 1942, the best of it ample evidence that Newman's keen eye for graphic composition was honed early on. Pictures of anonymous façades and found still-life arrangements, a few of which have been eccentrically trimmed and/or collaged, show that he shared an appreciation for Abstract Expressionism with Aaron Siskind and anticipated the assemblages Rauschenberg called "combines" by about twenty years. Through March 24. (Howard Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010.)

Short List

WOUT BERGER / MIKE BRODIE: Benrubi, 41 E. 57th St. 212-888-6007. Through March 10. **JOSEPH BEUYS:** Zwirner & Wirth, 32 E. 69th St. 212-517-8677. Through March 31. **ALINE KOMINSKY CRUMB:** Baumgold, 74 E. 79th St. 212-861-7338. Through March 17. **DAVID HAMMONS:** L & M, 45 E. 78th St. 212-861-0020. Through March 10. **PHILIP TAAFFE:** Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave. 212-744-2313. Through March 31. **"DIANE ARBUS—HELEN LEVITT: A CONVERSATION":** Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 212-397-3930. Through March 10.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

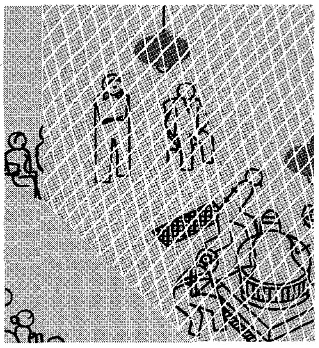
ANDREA FRASER
The artist infamous for humping the curves of Gehry's Guggenheim Bilbao (not to mention a paying art collector) shows some early work. Fraser's photographs started life as slides in 1984—or rather, they started considerably earlier, as Raphaels, Titians, Pollocks, and de Koonings. Juxtaposing museum-shop transparencies, Fraser tattooed Madonnas and Venuses with drips and attached Expressionist faces to Renaissance bodies. As large color prints, the pictures are quite beautiful, if far too luxe for the gesture's snark. An accompanying video (from 2005) takes off on the Guggenheim piece by following Fraser through the Sistine Chapel as she listens, piously, to an unctuous Acoustiguide tour. Through March 10. (Petzel, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9467.)

GRAHAM PARKS
Thanks to an elaborate process of underpainting, masking, and cutting away, Parks's paintings look as if they were made with the assistance of AutoCAD software. He builds up layers of paint over moody smears of earthy color, then slices into them, making intricate silhouettes of tree branches, foliage, and rippling water. The sylvan details cast a sharp, lacy scrim over the indistinct color patches, and the powerful figure/ground illusion makes the patterns seem to recede until it feels as if one's eye were nearly pressed to the canvas. The gestalt is so totally controlled that landscape painting—even in this heavily pastiched mode—gives way to advanced design. Through March 10. (Kinz, Tillou + Feigen, 535 W. 20th St. 212-929-0500.)

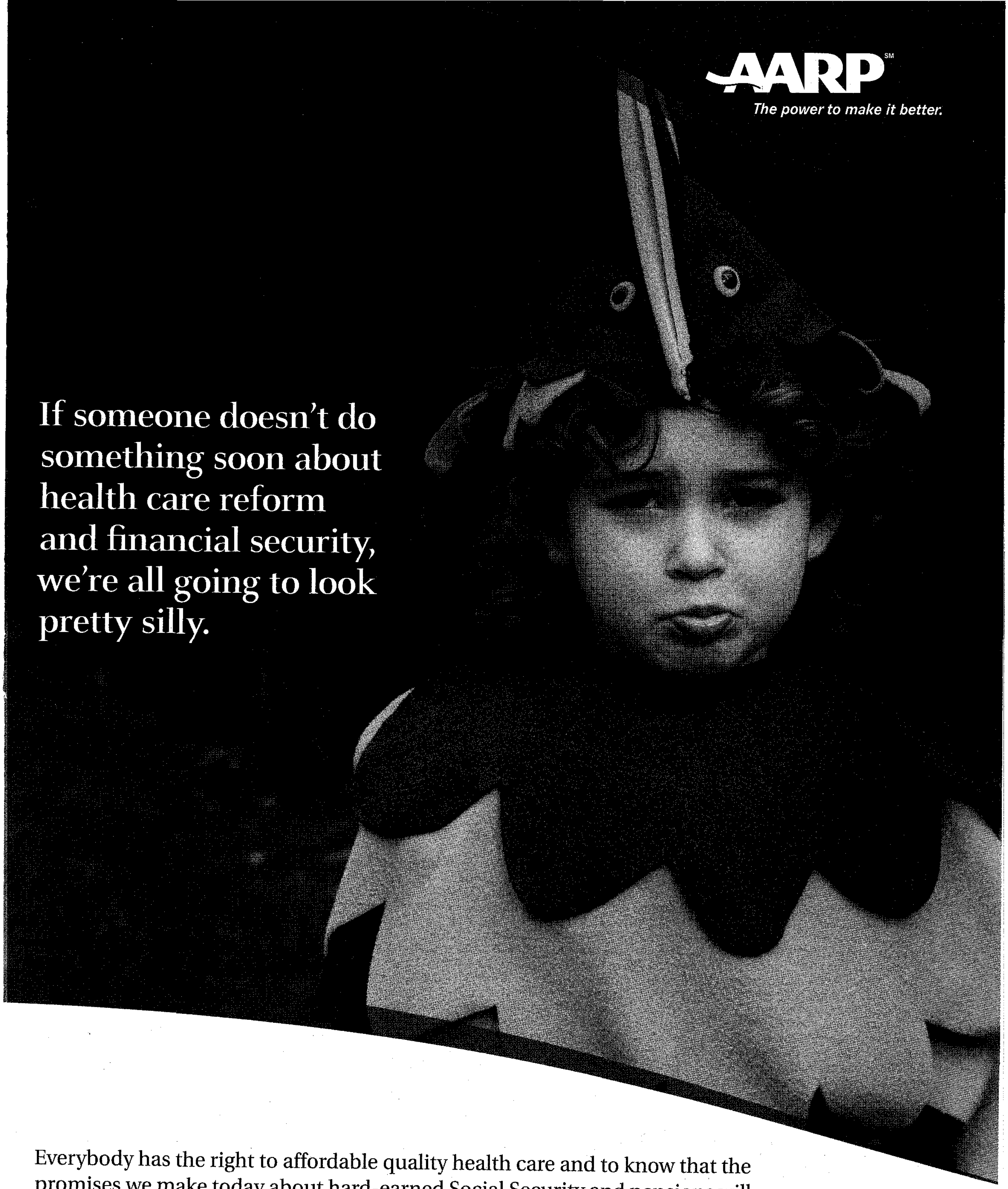
HARUKO TANAKA / CUPOLA BOBBER
Installation and performance mix in a pair of shows, one by the California-based artist Tanaka and the other by a collaborative duo from Chicago that calls itself Cupola Bobber. Tanaka—who was raised in Japan and England—meditates on expressive trivia such as the distinctive triangle fold with which her mother compacts plastic grocery bags. Cupola Bobber (Tyler Myers and Stephen Fiehn) aims instead for the ridiculous sublime, constructing a cardboard "observatory" in which viewers can climb a ladder to peep at mocked-up stars. Through March 10. (Cue, 511 W. 25th St. 212-206-3583.)

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
THE CUCKOO'S NEST

When Peter Weiss's metatheatrical masterwork "Marat/Sade" opened on Broadway in 1965, the production—directed by Peter Brook and starring a young and extremely gifted Glenda Jackson in the role of Marat's assassin, Charlotte Corday—threw any notion of polite or naturalistic theatre out the window. Employing bits of Artaud's theories concerning the theatre of cruelty and Brecht's "alienation" techniques, Brook's staging had a tendency to make audience members feel like the inhabitants of France's Charenton Asylum, where the play is set, nineteen years after the French Revolution: a bit mad, wired, and sensitized by Weiss's dark themes and brilliant songs and monologues. Now, under the direction of Christopher McElroen, the ever-visionary Classical Theatre of Harlem has restaged the play in its own way: all the inmates are men, and the few female actors are relegated to the sidelines, playing the spectators at the asylum. And so we see "Marat/Sade" with new eyes: as a feminist work, wherein men and not women are the hysterics—and the subject of the gaze.
—Hilton Als



LAURENT CILLUFFO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Short List

ROBERT GOBER: Marks, 526 W. 22nd St. and 521 W. 21st St. 212-243-0200. Through March 10. **JUSTINE KURLAND:** Mitchell-Innes & Nash, 534 W. 26th St. 212-744-7400. Through April 7. **CHARLES LEDRAY:** Sperone Westwater, 415 W. 13th St. 212-999-7337. Through March 24. **JUNE LEAF:** Thorp, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 24th St. 212-691-6565. Through March 10. **ANTHONY MCCALL:** Sean Kelly, 528 W. 29th St. 212-239-1181. Through March 17. **ROBERT MANGOLD:** PaceWildenstein, 545 W. 22nd St. 212-989-4258. Through March 10. **RUUD VAN EMPEL:** Stux, 530 W. 25th St. 212-352-1600. Through March 17. **CORBAN WALKER:** PaceWildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 212-929-7000. Through March 10. **GILLIAN WEARING:** Rosen, 525 W. 24th St. 212-627-6000. Through March 10.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

NEIL WINOKUR

On the surface, Winokur's photographs have always had the artlessness (and saturated, Pop color) of a children's picture book, but they're rarely without an undertow of hipster cunning; his cheeriness cuts like a knife. If there's little sense of the dark side in this new series—twenty-six posterlike images representing the letters of the alphabet—they've still got a sly, wise-guy edge. Conceived with Winokur's own young children in mind (they appear as Boy and Girl), the project is, as usual, energized by the elegant simplicity of the individual objects (an apple, an egg, a feather, an ice cube, a glass of water) and backdrop colors so bold that the room fairly vibrates. Through March 10. (Borden, 560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-431-0166.)

FRANCIS WOLFF

Wolff was an executive at the Blue Note jazz label who photographed his musicians in their recording sessions. Some forty examples dating from the fifties and sixties are on view here. Through March 18. (Morrison Hotel, 124 Prince St., near Wooster St. 212-941-8770.)

DANCE

PAUL TAYLOR DANCE COMPANY

The venerable company's New York season enters its second week, with ever-changing mixed bills that pair Taylor's two latest works—"Lines of Loss" and "Troilus and Cressida (reduced)"—with old standbys and rarely seen works from the vault. The list of revivals includes the striking "Profiles" (1979), with its two-dimensional figures; the witty, brash "Book of Beasts" (1971); the playful "Piece Period" (1962); as well as returning favorites like "Sunset," "Piazzolla Caldera," and "Roses." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. March 6-8 and March 13 at 7, March 9 at 8, March 10 at 2 and 8, and March 11 at 3. Through March 18. For daily programs, see www.nycitycenter.org.)

"YOU MADE ME A MONSTER"

The choreographer William Forsythe's meditation on the dehumanizing effects of disease is part of Toni Morrison's multidisciplinary festival, "Art Is Otherwise." (Baryshnikov Arts Center, 450 W. 37th St. 212-279-4200. March 6-7 at 7, 8, 9, and 10.)

PHILIPPE DECOUFLÉ

The Frenchman Philippe Decouflé has choreographed Olympic ceremonies with casts of thousands, but in "Solo: Le Doute M'Habite" ("The Doubt Within") he appears alone onstage, creating a series of self-portraits with voice-over narration, dance, and real-time video special effects. An orchestral score and colorful projected images make Decouflé the star of his own mini-"Fantasia," with references to Busby Berkeley, Gene Kelly, and Marcel Marceau. Despite the gloomy title, Decouflé supplies more charm than introspection: he's like the highest-tech street performer you've ever seen. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. March 6-7 at 7:30, March 8-10 at 8, and March 11 at 2 and 7:30.)

DUŠAN TÝNEK DANCE THEATRE

Since forming his company, in 2002, Týnek has earned much praise for his poetic theatricality, but the accolades reached a new level last year with the première of "Košile." That work, a folktale in fragments, will be reprised at the 92nd Street Y's Harkness Dance Festival. For "Fleur-de-Lis," a première, Týnek uses familiar sacred imagery—the Annunciation, Caravaggio's depictions of Christ, the Resurrection—to set the scene for encounters between mere mortals and the divine. (Ailey Citigroup Theatre, 405 W. 55th St. 212-415-5500. March 7-8 and March 10 at 8 and March 11 at 2 and 7.)

MIGUEL GUTIERREZ AND THE POWERFUL PEOPLE

Gutierrez's ensemble work "Everyone" proceeds in short motifs that shift subtly as they repeat—a method that has its longueurs but also provides its share of surprises. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101. March 7-8 at 7:30, March 9-10 at 7:30 and 9:30, and March 11 at 3.)

MARCIA MILHAZES DANCE COMPANY

The Brazilian choreographer has said that the origin of her work "Tempo de Verão" ("Summertime") is her love for Brazilian waltzes. These lilting melodies for accordion and strings seem to take hold of her three dancers, drawing out their feelings and memories and providing a landscape for the playing out of the lazy experiences and relationships of a long, hot summer. The women's gauzy dresses in warm colors and the whimsical set design—by Beatriz Milhazes, Marcia's sister—echo this breezy mood. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. March 8-10 at 7:30.)

LA MANGA VIDEO & DANCE CO.

The Mexican dancer Gabriela Medina and the visual artist Mario Villa make extensive use of video projections in their work. For "The Hershey Man," the intimate theatre at the Joyce SoHo is transformed into a kind of boxing ring, in which Medina shares space with images that are at times filled with poetry, and at others, with violence and pain. (155 Mercer St. 212-334-7479. March 8-10 at 8.)

KEELY GARFIELD

In her latest evening-length work, "Line & Sink Her," the eclectic downtown choreographer is the central figure in an odyssey. Along the way, she is joined by seven dancers and two musicians, on harmonium and trumpet, whose sounds summon images of the sea: foghorns, mermaids. Physical courage is a recurring theme, evoked by depictions of a bound martyr, a duel, and characters who struggle to summon the energy to stand up and move forward. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. March 8-10 at 8:30 and March 11 at 7:30.)

BRIDGMAN / PACKER DANCE

In their trilogy in progress, begun in 2003, the partners in art and life Art Bridgman and Myrna Packer have been exploring the visual and thematic possibilities of integrating video with live movement, making it possible for the two to dance with multiple images of themselves, swap body parts, and share real and virtual space. At Dance New Amsterdam, they introduce the final installment, "Memory Bank." (280 Broadway, at Chambers St. 212-279-4200. March 8-10 at 8 and March 11 at 3.)

"FAGAALA"

A dance about the Rwandan genocide could easily succumb to preachiness. "Fagaala," a joint creation of Germaine Acogny (from Senegal) and Kota Yamazaki (from Japan), runs in the opposite direction. Melding Butoh technique and West African dance—at times successfully, at others, less so—it bores through its subject to the primal forces underneath. Much of the symbolism is baffling, but the well-channelled trauma makes for some powerful dancing by the men of the Senegalese Compagnie Jant-Bi. Presented by 651 Arts. (BAM Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100. March 10 at 8.)

TABLES FOR TWO
DRESSLER

149 Broadway, between Bedford and Driggs Aves., Brooklyn (718-384-6343)—Colin Devlin, the owner of Williamsburg's beloved DuMont, named his latest venture after Steven Millhauser's 1996 novel, "Martin Dressler," about an up-from-nothing hotelier in turn-of-the-century Manhattan. The choice seems only partly propitious. Martin Dressler rises in the world and is fortunate to be able to satisfy "his heart's desire," but, as Millhauser writes, "this is a perilous privilege, which the gods watch jealously, waiting for the flaw, the little flaw, that brings everything to ruin, in the end." Is there a little flaw here? Some Williamsburgers have complained that Dressler is too fancy or too expensive for the neighborhood—strange, if you consider that Peter Luger is across the street. There was also a report that the Dressler rib eye was in fact a strip and that a seviche came out cooked. But nothing so far augurs ruin, except perhaps to Williamsburg's self-image.

Dressler is a fine-looking place. Something about the glittering light, the wrought-steel chandeliers, the ornate grillwork, and the sprawling zinc bar contributes to an anachronistic air of haut-boho refinement that one may associate with the beginning of the end in certain now-overrun Manhattan neighborhoods. The chefs, Polo Dobkin and Cal Elliott, who come from the Gramercy Tavern, serve up an array of stalwarts (cod, striper, short rib) without resorting to gimmickry or bombast. The fare is notionally seasonal American, a collection of mostly familiar appropriations, many with a nod to the South. Nothing is dull or outrageous. On a recent evening, a rich allotment of quail and bacon (from "a guy in Tennessee with a couple of pigs," the waiter said) came atop a bed of luscious grits. Apparently, and unsurprisingly, everyone who works at the place is addicted to them. The skin on the roast chicken is popular, too. Among the appetizers, smoked sturgeon with potato galette and frisée, a cauliflower soup with sautéed bay scallops subbing for croutons, and pea-and-Fontina raviolini in a buttery Parmesan broth inspired repeated sorties from enemy utensils. Maybe the lamb ragout was too salty. If it's fatal flaws the gods are after, however, they'll have to keep jealously watching. (Open daily for dinner, Sundays for brunch. Entrées $19-$30.)

—*Nick Paumgarten*

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA

The Franco Zeffirelli production of **"La Traviata,"** which has been floating about the schedule for the last two months, returns with a promising cast that features Krassimira Stoyanova, Jonas Kaufmann (who made a strong impression as Alfredo last season), and Dwayne Croft, and a new conductor, Marco Armiliato. (March

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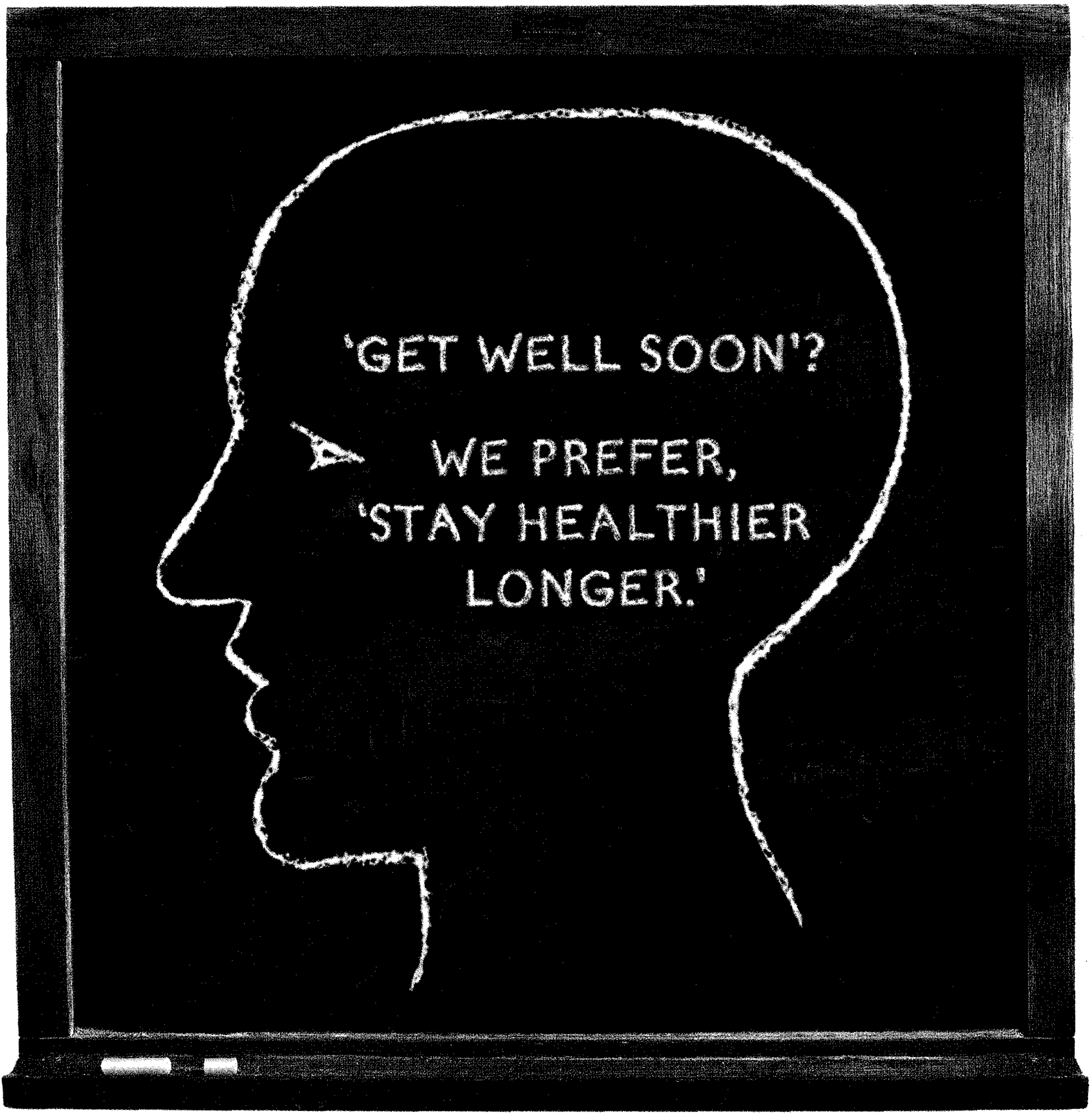

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7 at 8 and March 10 at 8:30.) ♦ **"Die Zauberflöte,"** with Lisa Milne, Cornelia Götz, Michael Schade, and Rodion Pogossov; James Levine conducts. (March 8 at 8. This is the final performance.) ♦ **"Simon Boccanegra,"** with Thomas Hampson, Angela Marambio, Marcus Haddock, and Ferruccio Furlanetto in the leading roles. Hampson's and Furlanetto's heartfelt performances—and a collection of gorgeous, if slightly anachronistic, sets and costumes—ameliorate the excesses of Verdi's convoluted plot; Fabio Luisi. (March 9 at 8.) ♦ **"Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg"** is one of James Levine's specialties—he imbues it with a Mozartean lightness that can make the performance's five-hour span pass by with an agreeable celerity. The cast features such house favorites as Hei-Kyung Hong, Johan Botha, Evgeny Nikitin, and the redoubtable James Morris in the role of Hans Sachs. (March 10 at noon.) ♦ With John Keenan replacing Levine. (March 13 at 6. This is the final performance.) ♦ Ramón Vargas takes the title role of Gounod's **"Faust"** in Andrei Serban's colorful, if somewhat scattered, production from 2005. Ruth Ann Swenson sings the role of Marguerite, while Ildar Abdrazakov steps into the shoes of Méphistophélès; Maurizio Benini. (March 12 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA

A new production of Gilbert and Sullivan's **"The Pirates of Penzance"** features not only the Broadway stars Marc Kudisch (as the Pirate King) and Mark Jacoby but also such skillful house comedians as Myrna Paris and Kevin Burdette, and Sarah Jane McMahon and Matt Morgan as the romantic leads; Gerald Steichen conducts. (March 7-8 at 7:30 and March 10 at 1:30 and 8.) ♦ The graceful, appealing Mark Lamos production of **"Madama Butterfly"** returns, with Angela Maria Blasi, Misoon Ghim, Raul Melo, and Grant Youngblood in the leading roles; George Manahan. (March 9 at 8 and March 11 at 1:30.) (New York State Theatre. 212-721-6500.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC: "MY FAIR LADY"

Lorin Maazel's charges put away the Brahms and Beethoven to spend a week with the Lerner and Loewe masterpiece. Kelsey Grammer and Kelli O'Hara are Henry Higgins and Eliza Doolittle, with Charles Kimbrough, Brian Dennehy, and the estimable Marni Nixon (who sang Audrey Hepburn's numbers in the film version) rounding out the cast; Rob Fisher conducts the semi-staged performances. (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. March 7-8 at 7:30 and March 9-10 at 8.)

BROOKLYN PHILHARMONIC

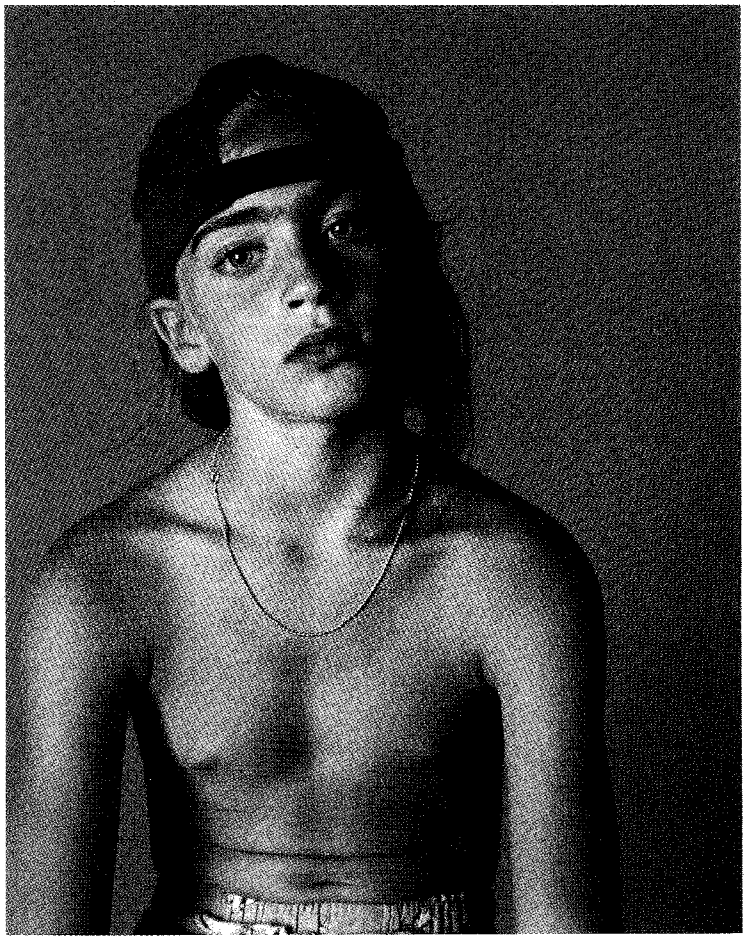
Flexibility is the hallmark of Michael Christie's new regime at the orchestra. March 9 at 8: The conductor and his band act as backup group for the freak-folk avatars Antony and the Johnsons, who will perform several new songs in arrangements by Nico Muhly. ♦ March 10 at 8: Christie's second classical concert of the season, "Bridge to the Beyond," features works by Osvaldo Golijov, including the New York première of a new orchestration for Golijov's "Dreams and Prayers of Isaac the Blind" (with the charismatic clarinettist David Krakauer) and the Argentine-American composer's tango fantasy "Last Round," along with Mahler's exuberant Symphony No. 1 in D Major. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100.)

THE DESSOFF CHOIRS

James Bagwell's able avocational chorus, in business for some eighty seasons, embarks on a contemporary-music program that features works by Elliott Carter ("Musicians Wrestle Everywhere," an early work), Duckworth, and Kyle Gann (a première), among others. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. March 10 at 8.)

PRISM QUARTET AND CANTORI NEW YORK

Saxophone quartet and chorus may not seem a likely combination, but the Prism Quartet—which has appeared in concerto roles with the Detroit Symphony and the Cleveland Orchestra—can probably pull it off. The group joins Mark Shapiro's admired chamber choir in recent works by Giya Kancheli, Erkki-Sven Tüür, and Astor Piazzolla. (Church of the Holy Trinity, 316 E. 88th St. March 10 at 8. Tickets at the door.)



Catherine Opie's "Jesse," in "Family Pictures," at the Guggenheim.

COLUMBIA SINFONIETTA

Jeffrey Milarsky leads this crack chamber band devoted to the performance of progressive works for live ensembles and electronic sounds. Its latest concert features "The Angel of Death," a major work with solo piano (Stephen Gosling) by the avant-garde veteran Roger Reynolds; Frédéric Voisin, a computer-music expert dispatched from Paris's IRCAM center, will help bring it off. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. March 10 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

RUSSIAN NATIONAL ORCHESTRA

This hardy, independent orchestra, founded by the protean Mikhail Pletnev, plays with that zealous sense of commitment that has always characterized the best Russian ensembles. In the first of two concerts at Avery Fisher Hall, its principal guest conductor, Vladimir Jurowski, leads the group in Stravinsky's "Scherzo Fantastique," Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto (with Leonidas Kavakos), and Prokofiev's Symphony No. 5. (212-721-6500. March 13 at 8.)

RECITALS

GALILEO'S DAUGHTERS: "VENETIAN TREASURES"

The Midtown Concerts series hosts a brief program by the Baroque trio (featuring the soprano Sarah Pillow) including sacred and secular works by such Venetian masters as Monteverdi and Strozzi. (Church of St. Francis of Assisi, 135 W. 31st St. March 7 at 1:15. No tickets required.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

Leon Kirchner, an expressive modernist who has been an icon of American music for half a century, is one of the Society's "season composers"; in tribute, the Orion String Quartet will perform all four of his quartets (including the New York première of No. 4) in one concert at Alice Tully Hall. (212-875-5788. March 7 at 7:30.)

BARGEMUSIC

The pianist Gerald Robbins is in residence at the floating chamber-music series this week. March 8 at 8: Works by Mozart, Schumann (the "Grand Sonata" in F-Sharp Minor), Rachmaninoff, and Prokofiev. ♦ March 9-10 at 8: Germanic seriousness substitutes for Russian virtuosity, with the Schumann complemented by Schubert's Sonata in A Major, Op. Posth. 120, and Brahms's "Handel Variations." ♦ March 11 at 4: Some distinguished colleagues (including the Philharmonic's concertmaster, Glenn Dicterow) join Robbins for piano quartets by Schumann and Brahms (No. 1 in G Minor). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-2083.)

BARYSHNIKOV ARTS CENTER: "THE MOVADO HOUR"

One of the city's most inviting casual concert series (refreshments are served before the concert) presents an hour-long program of masterworks for strings (featuring a selection of Bartók's Duos for Two Violins and Schoenberg's "Verklärte Nacht") by such young chamber-music masters as the violinist Jennifer Frautschi and the cellist Edward Arron. (450 W. 37th St. March 9 at 7. For free tickets, which are required, call 917-934-4966.)

HARPSICHORD UNLIMITED

Elaine Comparone's stalwart Baroque series deviates slightly from the usual, including a selection of traditional Swedish music along with works by Loeillet and Telemann. Her guest is Bruce Sagan, who plays on a version of the nyckelharpa, a kind of cross between a harpsichord and a viola. (First Moravian Church, Lexington Ave. at 30th St. 212-280-1086. March 10 at 7:30.)

JUAN DIEGO FLÓREZ

The exciting Peruvian tenor, making his Carnegie Hall recital début, offers a slate of songs and arias by Bellini, Rossini, Fauré, and Massenet, among others. (212-247-7800. March 10 at 8.)

AN DIE MUSIK

The outgoing and expert group gathers its far-flung members a few times a year at Merkin Concert Hall, where they join with such fine Gotham friends as the cellist Edward Arron and the violinist Nicholas Mann, their guests for a program of works by Shostakovich, Tchaikovsky, Arensky (the plaintive Quartet for Violin, Viola, and Two Cellos), and Schumann (the Piano Quartet). (129 W. 67th St. 212-501-3330. March 11 at 4.)

"NEW MUSIC FROM INDIANA"

Bloomington may be a quiet town, but Indiana University has been producing some of the best young composers in America for more than a decade. The school's new-music ensemble comes to Miller Theatre to offer works by David Dzubay, Claude Baker, and P. Q. Phan, along with a classic by Takemitsu ("Rain Coming"). (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. March 12 at 8.)

MOVIES OPENING

BEYOND THE GATES
A drama about a priest (John Hurt) who attempts to turn his school into a refuge for Tutsis during the Rwandan genocide. Directed by Michael Caton-Jones. Opening March 9. (IFC Center.)

EXTERMINATING ANGELS
Reviewed below in Now Playing. Opening March 7. (IFC Center.)

THE HOST
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening March 9. (Empire 25 and Sunshine Cinema.)

MAXED OUT
A documentary by James Scurlock about the American excess of personal debt. Opening March 9. (Cinema Village.)

THE NAMESAKE
A drama, directed by Mira Nair and based on a novel by Jhumpa Lahiri, about the American-born son of Indian immigrants. Starring Kal Penn, Jacinda Barrett, Irfan Khan, and Tabu. Opening March 9. (Angelika Film Center and Paris.)

300
An action film, directed by Zack Snyder, based on Frank Miller's graphic novel about the Battle of Thermopylae. Starring Gerard Butler and Lena Headey. Opening March 9. (In wide release.)

THE ULTIMATE GIFT
A devotional drama about a young man whose grandfather bequeaths him a series of twelve life tests. Directed by Michael O. Sajbel. Starring Drew Fuller, Abigail Breslin, James Garner, and Brian Dennehy. Opening March 9. (Empire 25.)

NOW PLAYING

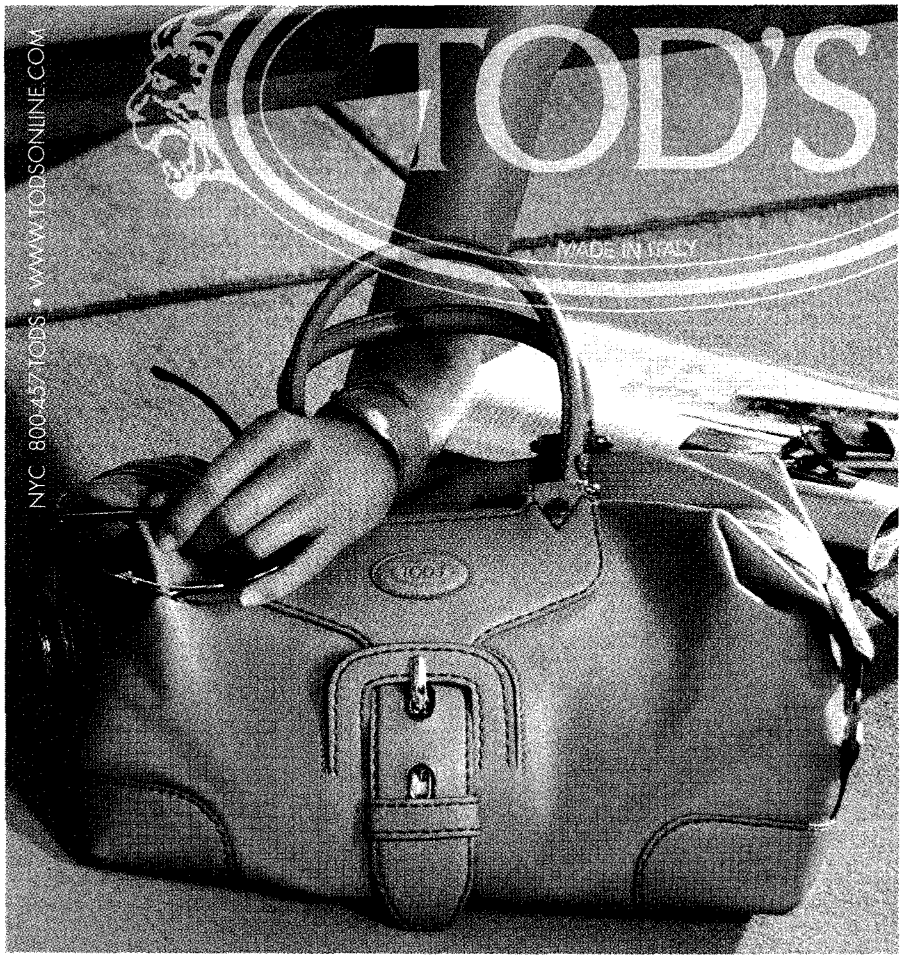
AMAZING GRACE
Square, but stirring. William Wilberforce (Ioan Gruffudd), upon entering Parliament in 1780 at the age of twenty-one, resolved, with the aid of his friend William Pitt (Benedict Cumberbatch), soon to be Prime Minister at the age of twenty-four, to end the slave trade in the British Empire. Michael Apted's historical epic, from a screenplay by Steven Knight, starts in 1797 when Wilberforce, suffering from colitis and getting much rained on (every time he goes out, he's doused), is at a low ebb. He is saved by the attentions of Barbara Spooner (Romola Garai), a Gainsborough beauty with a luxurious pile of red hair and an exposed pale bosom. As the picture goes backward in time and then forward again, there are eloquent debates, much moral and physical anguish from Wilberforce, and a spirit of Christian resolve, attended, fortunately, by wit. Gruffudd has a serious brow, a wide smile, and romantically disordered locks and, in the parliamentary scenes, he plants his feet and lets his voice ring out. With Albert Finney as the anguished ex-slave-ship captain John Newton, who wrote the words to the hymn "Amazing Grace," Michael Gambon as the influential Whig politician Charles James Fox, the singer Youssou N'Dour as the ex-slave Ouladaqh Equiano, and, as the radical agitator Thomas Clarkson, the supercilious Rufus Sewell, who might have trouble stifling a smirk while reciting the Seven Last Words of Christ.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 3/5/07.) (In wide release.)

BAMAKO
A courtroom drama with a difference. The tribunal in question, in one family's courtyard in a poor neighborhood in the capital of Mali, has no legal power but plenty of moral authority: its unofficial judges are trying the World Bank and the I.M.F. for their role in Africa's economic and social crises. Like all trials, this one opens the floodgates to rhetorical posturing, but the director, Abderrahmane Sissako, quickly gets past the bluster with careful, canny framings and poignant vignettes of daily life in and around the courtyard. With a light touch, a dry wit, and vast sympathy, he sketches the local ways of birth, death, health, work, art, law, and love—and suggests their painfully frustrating dependence on bureaucratic levers pulled half a world away. In French and Bambara.—*Richard Brody* (Film Forum.)

BLACK SNAKE MOAN
An intermittently engrossing but sanctimonious mess. Lazarus (Samuel L. Jackson), a small-time farmer and erstwhile bluesman, lives alone with the burning anger that has consumed him since his wife left him for his brother. Rae (Christina Ricci), an abused nymphomaniac prone to fits and flashbacks, loves the troubled Ronnie (Justin Timberlake), who has just shipped out for the Army, but she can't stay faithful to him for even a few hours. Finding her drugged, drunk, and bloodied on a back road near his farm, Lazarus takes her in and nurtures her with tough love, in a process of chaste mutual redemption that is as contrived and sentimental as it sounds. The writer-director, Craig Brewer, lovingly depicts the heartiness of country ways, but he is after something bigger than reality, and his quasi-mythological churnings boil down to this: messed-up white people depend on pious, soulful black folk to make them whole again. His inversion of long-discredited stereotypes smacks unintentionally of nostalgia for faithful servants. Despite the appealing locations, tangy dialogue, and intense, sincere performances (John Cothran is robust as R.L., a backwoods minister), this heady rural stew of violence, race, lust, and religion strains after Faulknerian depth but is mostly Southern-fried hooey.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

BREACH
A sombre real-life thriller about an incomprehensible man—Robert Hanssen (a leathery Chris Cooper), who spied for the Soviet Union and Russia for more than two decades while productively employed as a counter-intelligence agent for the F.B.I. Hanssen loved this country, didn't spy for money, went to church all the time, and also made films, for a male friend, of himself and his longtime wife making love. The movie is devoted to the young and ambitious F.B.I. employee, Eric O'Neill (Ryan Phillippe), who helped trap Hanssen (he was arrested in February, 2001). Most thrillers are hyped up; this one is grayed out. Tak Fujimoto shot it in subdued light, mostly in dour institutional corridors. The unexciting look and feel of the movie would be acceptable if the filmmakers had penetrated Hanssen's skull a little, but they didn't. Written by Adam Mazer, William Rotko, and Billy Ray, and directed by Ray. The picture was made in consultation with Eric O'Neill.—*D.D.* (2/19 & 26/07) (In wide release.)

BREAKING AND ENTERING
At home, Will Francis (Jude Law), a fashionable young London architect, has a difficult time. Liv (Robin Wright Penn), his girlfriend of ten years, a melancholy, becalmed beauty of mixed Swedish and American background, has a talented, lively autistic daughter—a terrific gymnast who won't eat and can't sleep or calm down. Will's office in North London is repeatedly burglarized after hours. Will stakes it out one night and follows the thief, a fifteen-year-old boy, Miro (Rafi Gavron), to an apartment in a council flat, where he discovers Miro's mother, Amira (Juliette Binoche), a Bosnian refugee with a refined face and a full peasant body. He starts an affair with her, going back and



forth between the two women. The romantic drama is set against the changing milieu of the King's Cross area, a multicultural gathering ground in which not terribly dangerous thieves and hookers from the Balkans and elsewhere try to find some way of fitting into an alien society. Written and directed by Anthony Minghella, the movie is shrewd and benevolent but rather mild—clemency, not judgment, is in Minghella's heart. Vera Farmiga has a hilarious bit as a huffy Balkan streetwalker wearing very little under her overcoat.—*D.D.* (1/29/07) (Paris and Sunshine Cinema.)

BRIDGE TO TERABITHIA

Katherine Paterson's children's classic gets an imaginative, emotional telling in director Gabor Csupo's film about a bullied fifth grader (Josh Hutcherson) whose friendship with a young girl (AnnaSophia Robb) leads them to create a made-up, escapist world. Screenwriters Jeff Stockwell and David Paterson (the author's son) have crafted a wonderful and affecting story, deftly balancing the real-world problems of introverted children and the fantasy lives they create to help them deal with their solitude. The special effects suggest a Narnia-like romp, but the movie has a darker, more sorrowful landscape to explore and it does so brilliantly, with true nuance and heartfelt sincerity.—*Bruce Diones* (In wide release.)

DVD NOTES
BATTLE OF THE SEXES

Two of Hollywood's most deliriously stylized movies, Busby Berkeley's "The Gang's All Here," from 1943, and Vincente Minnelli's "The Clock," from 1945, are now available on DVD. Both are Second World War romances involving soldiers on brief furloughs in New York, and their ornate flourishes embellish the tensions of life in wartime.

Berkeley's vertiginous musical, featured in **"The Alice Faye Collection"** (Fox), was filmed in Technicolor, and the gaudy palette inspired the director's most extravagant visual inventions, starting with a musical number done in long, swooping takes running from a dark soundstage to a shipyard that is revealed to be the colossal set of a Manhattan night club where Carmen Miranda and her tutti-frutti hat hold sway. A soldier about to ship out, the rich young Sergeant Andy Mason, Jr. (James Ellison), lays eyes on a plebeian showgirl, Eadie Allen (Alice Faye), and heatedly pursues her despite his long-standing relationship with the daughter of his father's Wall Street partner. Several dance routines feature Berkeley's classic geometric choreography (including the legendary one with giant bananas), but the film's concluding "Polka Dot Polka," which kaleidoscopically dissolves the characters into an erotic swirl of color, suggests that the freedom being fought for was largely sexual freedom.

"The Clock" (Warner) starts with the Sunday-morning arrival of a young Midwesterner in uniform, Corporal Joe Allen (Robert Walker), at the majestic old Penn Station on a forty-eight-hour pass. In his first bewildering minutes in the city, he and Alice Maybery (Judy Garland) meet cute and strike up a conversation that runs all day while she shows him the sights. Joe can't stop talking about his home town, his family, his childhood; in effect, he is downloading his memory to a friendly stranger for safekeeping in case he doesn't survive the war. The clock of the title is both the real one in the lobby of the Astor Hotel, where the pair arrange to meet, and the universal one they are racing against. The countdown turns the love story into a frenzied thriller, which is intensified by the stars' agitated, neurotic, near-hysterical performances. Though Minnelli's rhapsodic style unites the city and the lovers in a collective dream of romantic possibility, he saves the most sensual moments for his closeups of Garland (whom he was soon to marry). As Alice falls into Joe's embrace under the misty lights of Central Park, the involuntary tremors of her eyebrows register as historic events.

—*Richard Brody*

THE CATS OF MIRIKITANI

For her directing début, Linda Hattendorf found a remarkable subject in the laconic Jimmy Mirikitani, an eighty-year-old homeless Japanese-American artist and former detainee at an internment camp in California during the Second World War who was living on the streets of SoHo. When the attacks of 9/11 permeated the air of lower Manhattan with toxic fumes, Hattendorf invited Mirikitani, whom she had been casually filming, to take shelter in her downtown apartment. She documents their growing relationship as she helps him find lost relatives and, in spite of his reluctance, helps him get off the streets. With little more than a simple video camera, Hattendorf builds an acute, riveting portrait of a humble and dignified man whose obsession with the injustices he (and thousands of others) suffered is uneasily mitigated by human connection.—*Shauna Lyon* (Cinema Village.)

DAYS OF GLORY

A fascinating French battle epic devoted to an ironic subject—the bravery of Muslim soldiers from French North Africa who fought during the Second World War for "*la patrie*." But what, for these men, was *la patrie*? Colonial Algeria or Morocco? Denied standard leave and promotions, the men at times feel an intense chagrin. They are fighting to liberate France and desperately want recognition from the French, but what is France going to do for them? As in an American platoon film from the forties, there is the young man who needs to prove himself, the soldier who falls in love, the tough sergeant who both bullies and loves the men. Some of the staging is stiff, but there's a dandy little battle at the end, in which the unit of North Africans finds itself defending a village in Alsace-Lorraine against the Wehrmacht. Directed by Rachid Bouchareb. In French and Arabic.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

EXTERMINATING ANGELS

An inadvertent, unfunny dirty joke. The French director Jean-Claude Brisseau got actresses to perform sex acts on- and off-camera while auditioning them for a prior sexually explicit film and was subsequently convicted of sexual harassment. He now offers this fictionalized, leeringly erotic, self-justifying drama about the making of that film. François (Frédéric van den Driessche), a director who, like Brisseau, wants to make a film about female pleasure and the transgression of taboos, does research for it by watching actresses pursue orgasms alone and together (one of his experiments recalls the climactic scene in "When Harry Met Sally"). Dismissive of his actresses' emotional torments and his wife's objections, the vain and self-righteous François completes his film, crowned by Brisseau with martyrdom and sainthood. François's putative art film, like the one Brisseau offers here, is indistinguishable from pornography. The punch line is that François is surprised when his film turns out to be a success. In French.—*R.B.* (IFC Center.)

FACTORY GIRL

Edie Sedgwick, the skinny sixties heiress with enormous eyes and great legs who became a *Vogue* "youthquaker" and Warhol superstar and then, cast off by the great man, died of an overdose at twenty-eight, has inspired a kind of whirling minor bio-pic in which the heroine (Sienna Miller) burns brightly and then snuffs herself out. It's a very strange movie, frantic and useless, with a hyperactive camera that gives us no more than fleeting impressions of Edie in Warhol's Factory, Edie ecstatic at parties, Edie strung out on drugs, Edie lying, mostly naked, on a bed, her skin splotchy from injections. Miller laughs, fidgets, and acts up a storm of desperate anxiety, but the inexpressive script (by Aaron Richard Golub and the screenwriter who styles himself Captain Mauzner) doesn't help very much. Guy Pearce, who plays Warhol, has the appropriate interior slump, the ineffable malign vagueness, but the movie has nothing new to say about the Warhol scene and its victims, and we're left with the impression that the movie got made because Edie is still just notorious enough to be exploited one more time. Directed by George Hickenlooper.—*D.D.* (2/19 & 26/07) (In wide release.)

THE LIVES OF OTHERS

This first feature from the young German director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck starts in 1984, in East Berlin. A successful playwright (Sebastian Koch) and his girlfriend (Martina Gedeck), hitherto trusted by the state, are placed under Stasi surveillance. Their investigator, a lonely ascetic by the name of Wiesler (Ulrich Mühe), is told to entrap them, instead of which, little by little, he lets them off the hook. Given the movie's cross-weave of envy, terror, paranoia, and endangered principle, Donnersmarck might have been expected to tie himself in knots; yet the outcome, after two and a half hours, remains taut and clear, and by the end you feel exhausted and oddly uplifted. What was the last new movie that put you through so much yet convinced you that the ordeal was worthwhile? With Ulrich Tukur as Wiesler's cheerfully vicious boss. In German.—*Anthony Lane* (2/12/07) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

MUSIC AND LYRICS

In this lightweight comedy written and directed by Marc Lawrence, Hugh Grant plays a former member of a New Wave act with a chance at a musical comeback and Drew Barrymore plays his plant caretaker, who just happens to have a gift for lyrics. The movie is boilerplate listless in its romantic twists and turns, and both Barrymore and Grant seem to be following diagrams of their past performances in similar roles. Still, the movie is amiable enough to be entertaining, and some of the supporting performances, especially from Kristen Johnston as Barrymore's idol-smitten sister, are terrific. The music, by Adam Schlesinger, of Fountains of Wayne, who crafted perfect pop tunes for "That Thing You Do," is too intentionally joke-ridden and misses the magic this songwriting partnership sorely needs.—*B.D.* (In wide release.)

NORBIT

Eddie Murphy mocks every stereotype in the book and invents a few of his own in this raucous, vulgar comic extravaganza. In the three lead roles—as the mild-mannered title character; Rasputia, the blustering, obese harridan he marries; and Mr. Wong, the owner of the Chinese restaurant-cum-orphanage where he was raised—Murphy cuts loose with a panoply of antic impressions unmatched since the heyday of Jerry Lewis. As Norbit, Murphy channels the meek persona at the center of many Lewis classics, down to the accent, but he centers the film around Rasputia, a scintillating, uproarious villain. Despite the innumerable gags about her

DIVYA SRINIVASAN

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
HIS FAVORITE WIFE

Can a film be too beautiful? It is not a question that gets asked much these days, but the revival of "Raise the Red Lantern," at Film Forum through March 15, should resurrect the debate. Zhang Yimou's 1991 film, set in the nineteen-twenties, stars

Gong Li as Songlian, the fourth wife of a potent Chinese lord, who is snared in the schemes of her three contenders. Time and again, we return to a shot of the central courtyard, where a lantern is lit every evening to indicate which spouse will enjoy the master's favors during the coming night: a serene image of total and capricious subjection. The film may lack the emotional vigor of its immediate predecessor, the great "Ju Dou," yet there is brio in its wielding of color that even Michael Powell, fresh from "The Red Shoes," might have applauded, and the result glows with a political provocation that has dimmed in Zhang's more recent offerings. "Hero" (2002), for instance, despite its dynamism, settles for a reactionary neatness that the younger director could surely not have countenanced. As for Gong Li, who could have foreseen that she would end up, fifteen years later, in "Miami Vice"?

—*Anthony Lane*

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physique, this is, above all, a comedy of spousal abuse, and Rasputia's oppressive, disturbing conduct is deplorable, not her attributes. Whatever personal demons Murphy is exorcising by camping it up in drag while wearing a fat suit, he is clearly saying nothing about fat people in general but a great deal about himself. Unfortunately, the director, Brian Robbins, doesn't do much more than stage-manage the riotous proceedings. Though less than the sum of its parts, the movie is, even when not quite funny, nothing less than virtuosic—and if there's any justice in pop culture, it should coin a new catchphrase: "How *you* doin'?"—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

PIGS AND BATTLESHIPS
Shohei Imamura's vicious semi-satirical melodrama about untrammelled postwar materialism features hulking Yanks from the U.S. naval base at Yokosuka, a local gang that makes the Mafia look like the residents of Boys Town, and a thundering herd of black-market pigs. But at the core is the story of the youngest gang member, a befuddled naïf who believes that if he tends the pigs properly he'll earn a huge bonus and make his girlfriend happy. Both the satire and pathos get woefully thick—for example, three sailors rape the heroine and then break into "I've Been Working on the Railroad." What keeps the film alive is Imamura's prodigious eye for journalistic observations and for the varying shades of light that filter through his black-and-white story. Hisashi Yamauchi wrote the script; Toshiro Mayuzumi composed the score. Released in 1963. In Japanese.—*Michael Sragow* (BAM Rose Cinemas; March 10.)

THE UNTOUCHABLE
Jeanne, a young French actress (Isild Le Besco), learns that her father, whom she has never met, is a native and resident of India. She decides to go there to find him; to finance her trip, she takes a one-day role in a porn film. Le Besco has what passes these days for actorly courage, the readiness to appear in the altogether, and the director, Benoît Jacquot, seemingly slack-jawed with admiration before her beauty and abandon, can't take his camera off her. Despite the resulting lack of visual and emotional perspective, the film is saved by a vivid scene with a powerful idea. On the plane from Paris to New Delhi, Jeanne meets an elderly member of India's caste of untouchables (Yaseen Khan), who lucidly expounds the unconscionable discrimination they suffer and the peculiarity of Western indifference to it. Adding this analytical kick to Jeanne's sentimental voyage through India, Jacquot delivers a clever and memorable dramatic payoff. In French and English.—*R.B.* (IFC Center; March 7. Walter Reade Theatre; March 8 and March 10.)

THE WIND WILL CARRY US
Abbas Kiarostami's dark comedy, from 1999, is set in a sun-drenched Kurdish mountainside village where Behzad (Behzad Dourani), a director from Tehran, has come with his crew to film the unusual local funeral ceremony. Unfortunately for them, the moribund old woman for whom the services are planned is in no rush to give up the ghost, and Behzad is stuck there for weeks with little to do but talk with the villagers. Kiarostami films the encounters and the stunning landscapes with a patient, painterly tenderness, but his modest methods conceal high political goals. He uses the Iranian regime's severe limits on expression as classic Hollywood directors used the Hays Code—his meticulous realism becomes a subtle symbolism to express the forbidden. Amazingly, Kiarostami's main subject is sex, which he evokes in sly, infinitesimal touches worthy of Lubitsch and Hawks. Moment after moment, hint after hint alludes to the official abuse of religion and the natural force of desire: when a cynical old married woman refers to her "night work," it becomes clear why the entire film takes place

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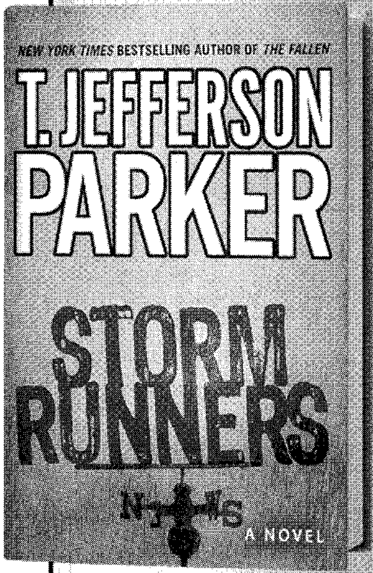

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by daylight. The title alone, from a love lyric by the pre-revolutionary poet Forugh Farrokhzad that Behzad quotes, suggests the irrepressible beauty of playtime. In Farsi and Kurdish.—*R.B.* (MOMA; March 7.)

ZODIAC

The so-called Zodiac killer, long an obsession of journalists, book writers, and bloggers, murdered at least five people in the San Francisco Bay Area in 1968 and 1969 and then sent confessions (sometimes in code) to newspapers. David Fincher's film about the affair, which takes the story to 1991, starts with a murder scene that is as creepy as anything Fincher has ever done, but most of the movie is uncharacteristically (and absorbingly) matter-of-fact. Operating with a script by Robert Graysmith—a cartoonist at the San Francisco *Chronicle* at the time of the killings who subsequently wrote two books about Zodiac—Fincher has made what is likely the most detailed crime procedural in movie history. The atmosphere and personalities in newspaper and police offices, the little bits of evidence, and the eurekas leading to blind alleys are all re-created with the excitement of fresh discovery. But, in the end, the teasing mystery of the killer's identity wears just about everyone out, both onscreen and off. With Jake Gyllenhaal as Graysmith, Chloë Sevigny as Graysmith's wife, Robert Downey, Jr., as a brilliant, self-destructive reporter, Mark Ruffalo and Anthony Edwards as hardworking cops, and the heavy-domed John Carroll Lynch as the most likely suspect.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

Also Playing

THE ASTRONAUT FARMER: In wide release. **DADDY'S LITTLE GIRLS:** In wide release. **GHOST RIDER:** In wide release. **INTO GREAT SILENCE:** Film Forum (in French and Latin). **THE NUMBER 23:** In wide release. **STARTER FOR 10:** In wide release. **WILD HOGS:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—The films of John Marshall. March 7 at 7 and March 8 at 9: "The Hunters" (1957). ♦ March 7 at 9:30 and March 9 at 7: "N!ai, the Story of a !Kung Woman" (1980) and "Bitter Melons" (1971). ♦ March 8 at 7: "Inside/Outside Station 9" (1970). ♦ March 9 at 9: "If It Fits" (1978) and a short film. ♦ March 10-11 at 3: "A Kalahari Family," parts 1-3 (2003). ♦ March 10-11 at 7:30: "A Kalahari Family," parts 4-5 (2003). ♦ "Personal Archives Presents." March 8 at 8: Works by Maysles Films, Inc. ♦ March 9 at 8: Works by Albert Maysles. ♦ Special event. March 10-11: "The Valerie Project," with live musical performances.

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"Pimps, Prostitutes and Pigs," the films of Shohei Imamura. All films are in Japanese. March 7-8 at 4, 6:50, and 9:40: "Vengeance Is Mine" (1979). ♦ March 10 at 6:50 and 9:15: "Pigs and Battleships" (†). ♦ March 11 at 6:50 and 9:30 and March 12 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "The Insect Woman" (1963). ♦ March 13 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Stolen Desire" (1958).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Through March 15: "Raise the Red Lantern" (1991, Zhang Yimou; in Mandarin).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through March 27: "French Seventies: Cinema After May '68." March 13 at 12:30 and 7: "The Mouth Agape" (1974, Maurice Pialat; in French). ♦ March 13 at 4 and 9: "The Musician Killer" (1976, Benoît Jacquot; in French).

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Rendez-Vous with French Cinema." All films are in French. March 7 at 7 and 9:15: "The Untouchable" (†). ♦ March 8 at 7 and 9:30: "One to Another" (2006, Pascal Arnold and Jean-Marc Barr). ♦ March 9 at 7 and 9:15: "Don't Worry, I'm Fine" (2006, Philippe Lioret). ♦ March 10 at 2:30 and 7:15: "I Do!" (2006, Eric Lartigau). ♦ March 10 at 4:45 and 9:30: "Murderers" (2006, Patrick Grandperret). ♦ March 11 at 2:45 and 9:30: "Tell No One" (2006, Guillaume Canet). ♦ March 11 at 5:15 and 7:15: "The Valet" (2006, Francis Veber). ♦ New York Children's Film Festival. March 11 at 11:30 A.M.: "Lepel" (2005, Willem van de Sande Bakhuyzen). For complete program information, go to www.gkids.com.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"Still Moving," films from the museum's collections. March 7-8 at 4:30: "Warning Shadows" (1923, Arthur Robison; silent). ♦ Through March 19: The films of Abbas Kiarostami. Except where noted, all films are in Farsi. March 7 at 6 and March 10 at 6: "Through the Olive Trees" (1994). ♦ March 7 at 8: "The Wind Will Carry Us" (†). ♦ March 8 at 6: "ABC Africa" (2001). ♦ March 8 at 8: "Ten" (2002) and "Dinner for One" (1995; in French). ♦ March 9 at 6: "Five" (2004). ♦ March 9 at 8: "10 on Ten" (2004). ♦ March 10 at 2: "Letters" (2006; in Spanish and Farsi). ♦ March 10 at 4: Short films, including "Rug" (2006). ♦ March 11 at 2: Short films, including "The Experience" (1973). ♦ March 11 at 4: "The Traveller" (1974) and short films. ♦ March 11 at 6: Short films, including "Orderly or Disorderly" (1981). ♦ March 12 at 6: Short films, including "The Wedding Suit" (1976). ♦ Films on contemporary art. March 8 at 6:15 and March 11 at 2: "Still" (1969-71, Ernie Gehr) and "One Second in Montreal" (1969, Michael Snow). ♦ "Rossellini Redux." March 9 at 8:30 and March 10 at 4:30: "Voyage in Italy" (1953). ♦ March 10 at 1:30 and March 12 at 6:30: "Descartes" (1973; in Italian). ♦ March 11 at 4: "Paisan" (1946; in Italian, English, and German).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Special screenings. March 7 at 7: "The Namesake" (2006, Mira Nair), followed by a discussion with the director. Screening to be held at Lincoln Square, 1998 Broadway, at 68th St., Manhattan (for ticket information, go to www.movingimage.us). ♦ March 10 at 1: "Offside" (2006, Jafar Panahi; in Farsi). ♦ March 10 at 3 and March 11 at 7:30: "Flags of Our Fathers" (2006, Clint Eastwood). ♦ March 10 at 6 and March 11 at 4:30: "Letters from Iwo Jima" (2006, Eastwood; in Japanese). ♦ "Fist and Sword," martial-arts films. March 11 at 2: "Versus" (2000, Ryuhei Kitamura; in Japanese).

PIONEER THEATRE

155 E. 3rd St. (212-591-0434)—In première. March 7-13 at 9: "Border Post" (2006, Rajko Grlić; in Croatian).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000, ext. 344)—"Cabaret Cinema." March 9 at 9:30: "Teorema" (1968, Pier Paolo Pasolini; in Italian), introduced by Marina Abramovic.

SUNSHINE CINEMA

143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." March 9-10: "The Untouchables" (1987, Brian De Palma).

THALIA THEATRE

Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—"A Tribute to Emil Habibi and Palestine." March 10 at 5: "Since You Left" (1996, Mohammed Bakri; in Arabic). ♦ March 10 at 7: A live performance by Bakri of "Almotashael," a novel by Habibi. In Arabic. ♦ In revival. March 11 at 8 and March 13 at 5: "Juliet of the Spirits" (1965, Federico Fellini; in Italian). ♦ March 11 at 8 and March 13 at 5: "Pride & Prejudice" (2005, Joe Wright).

WALTER READE THEATRE

Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—"Rendez-Vous with French Cinema." All films are in French. March 7 at 1:30 and 6:30 and March 10 at 4: "One to Another" (2006, Pascal Arnold and Jean-Marc Barr). ♦ March 7 at 4 and 9 and March

10 at 9: "Blame It On Fidel" (2006, Julie Gavras). ♦ March 8 at 2 and 6:30 and March 10 at 1:30: "The Untouchable" (†). ♦ March 8 at 4:15 and 9 and March 11 at 6:30: "Don't Worry, I'm Fine" (2006, Philippe Lioret). ♦ March 9 at 1:30 and 6:30 and March 11 at 8:45: "Murderers" (2006, Patrick Grandperret). ♦ March 9 at 4 and 9:10 and March 11 at 4: "I Do!" (2006, Eric Lartigau). ♦ March 10 at 6:30 and March 11 at 1:30: "The Valet" (2006, Francis Veber). ♦ Special screening. March 12 at 7: "Offside" (2006, Jafar Panahi; in Farsi), followed by a discussion with the historian Hamid Dabashi.

READINGS AND TALKS

NATIONAL BOOK CRITICS CIRCLE READING
More than two dozen finalists, including Donald Antrim, Alison Bechdel, Mark Doty, and Simon Schama, read from their work. (The New School, 66 W. 12th St. No tickets necessary. March 7 at 6.)

OLIVER SACKS
The neurologist and writer discusses how music affects the brain. (Low Library, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. No tickets necessary. March 7 at 6:15.)

PUSHCART PRIZE CELEBRATION
The poets Lucille Clifton, Billy Collins, Maxine Kumin, Grace Schulman, Gerald Stern, and C. K. Williams honor the poetry prize, its founder, Bill Henderson, and the publication of "The Pushcart Book of Poetry: The Best Poems from 30 Years of the Pushcart Prize." (Baruch Performing Arts Center, 55 Lexington Ave., at 25th St. No tickets necessary. March 8 at 7.)

NATIONAL ARTS CLUB
A reading with the novelists Mayra Montero ("Dancing to 'Almendra'") and Matthew Sharpe ("Jamestown") and the poet James Wilde ("Crocodile Shoes.") (15 Gramercy Park S. No tickets necessary. March 8 at 7.)

BETSY ANDREWS
The poet reads from "New Jersey," her newly published book-length poem about the Garden State's turnpike. (Superfine, 126 Front St., Brooklyn. No tickets necessary. March 12 at 6:30.)

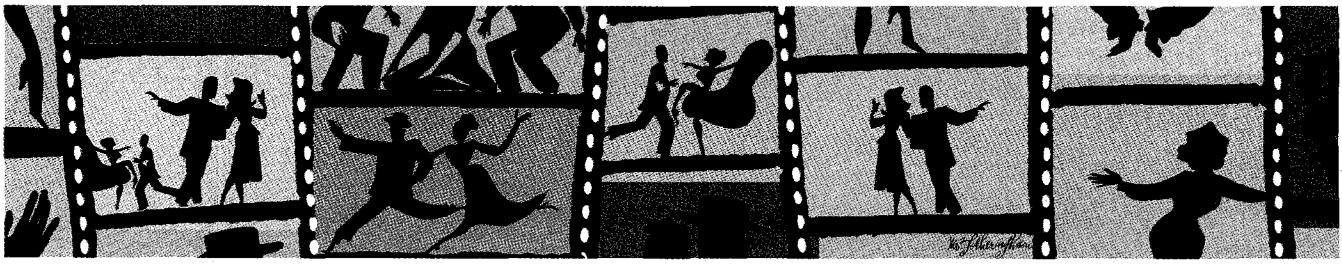
QUEENS COLLEGE
Cynthia Ozick, Norman Rush, and James Wood share their thoughts on the life and death of the novel. (LeFrak Concert Hall, the Music Building, Flushing. For more information, visit www.qc.edu/readings. March 13 at 7.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

THE NEW VICTORY THEATRE
The rocker turned kids' musician Dan Zanes performs songs from his latest album for the underage set, "Catch That Train!," a rollicking collection of songs about an imaginary rail voyage. (209 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. March 9 at 7 and March 10-11 at noon and 5, with a post-performance discussion with the artist following the 5 P.M. show on the 10th.)

USA MEMORY CHAMPIONSHIP
The competitors in this annual test of memorization are dubbed "mental athletes," and they are given faces and names, sequences of playing cards, random words, strings of numbers, and poetry to study, then scored on how well they can recall the information. And, while there are strategies for preparing, don't think that well-read English majors have any advantage—the poetry used here has never been published. The winner goes on to compete in the World Memory Championships, in Bahrain later this year. (Con Edison Auditorium, 4 Irving Pl., at 14th St. For more information, visit www.usamemorychampionship.com. March 10, from 9 to 5.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
Sotheby's auction of American paintings (March 8) features a handful of watercolors and pencil drawings by Reginald Marsh (1898-1954)—a one-time newspaper man who dedicated himself to portraying scenes from life in New York—that vividly illustrate the crowded conditions on the beach at Coney Island, down-and-out bums on the Bowery, and other less than glamorous city sights. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ A sunnier vision emerges from **Christie's** sale of American paintings, drawings, and sculptures (March 9), in which a luminous painting of a beach by Edmund William Greacen shares the block with an almost childlike watercolor of the crooked, colorful houses of Harpers Ferry by Childe Hassam. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Phillips** woos the hip young collector at one of its quarterly "Saturday@Phillips" auctions (March 10), a smorgasbord of paintings, sculpture, design pieces, jewelry, and photographs. (450 W. 15th St. 212-940-1200.) ♦ The lots at **Swann's** sale of medical books and autographs (March 8) range from such poetically titled tomes as Robert Burton's "The Anatomy of Melancholy" (1628) to more eccentric volumes, like John Elliotson's 1843 treatise "Numerous Cases of Surgical Operations Without Pain in the Mesmeric State." (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)



EDWIN FOTHERINGHAM

ON THE HORIZON

CLASSICAL MUSIC
FRONT MEN
March 26

The American Composers Orchestra makes several top composer-performers—including Steven Mackey and Vijay Iyer—sing for their supper by soloing in their own works at Zankel Hall. (212-247-7800.)

THE THEATRE
SPACEY COMETH
March 29

The Old Vic's production of Eugene O'Neill's "A Moon for the Misbegotten" is moving from London to New York for a limited run. It will be the fifth Broadway incarnation of the play, with Kevin Spacey in the role of the hardened alcoholic Jim Tyrone. (212-307-4100.)

ART
POP CIRCUS
March 30

The Turner Prize-winning artist Martin Creed makes work that ever so slightly tweaks the perceptions of its viewers; at MOMA right now, his "Work 227: The Lights Going On and Off" is doing just what the title promises and nothing more. Creed will take a more maximal route with his "Variety Show" at Abrons Arts Center, and, while the exact nature of the performance has not been determined, dancers, musicians, and actors have been hired for the spectacle. (www.publicartfund.org)

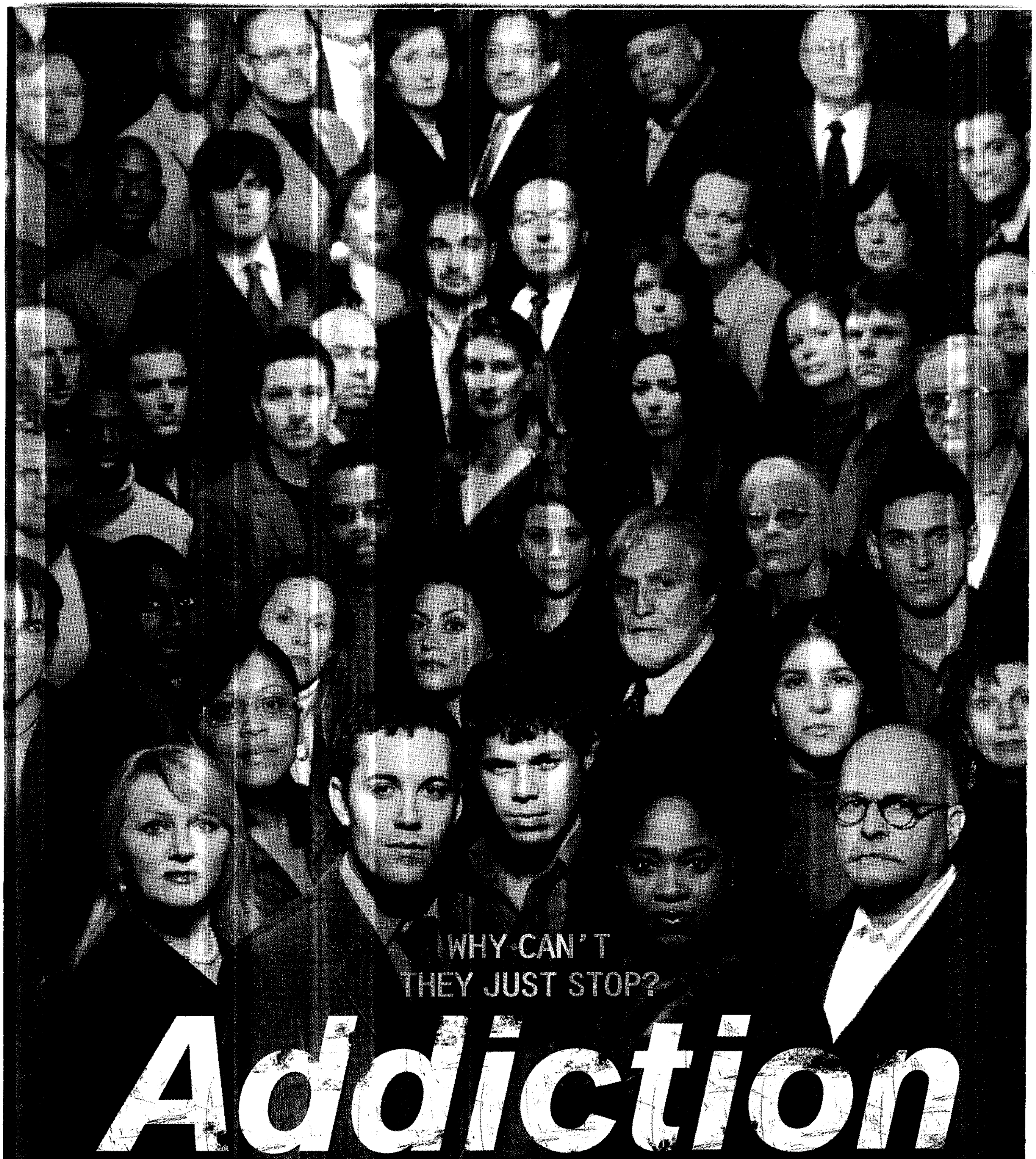
MOVIES
B-BOPPERS
March 30-April 19

Forgotten songs, kitschy routines, overlooked actors or great ones in oddball stories—all of these and more guilty pleasures are on display in Film Forum's three-week feast of B musicals. Marilyn Monroe sings in "Ladies of the Chorus," Fats Waller and Bill (Bojangles) Robinson perform the finale of "Hooray for Love," and the title of "Moonlight and Pretzels" says it all. (212-727-8110.)

NIGHT LIFE
BUSTIN' LOOSE
April 19

Though he's in his early seventies, Chuck Brown, the godfather of the Washington, D.C., funk subgenre known as go-go, is back with a new album of sizzling party songs, "We're About the Business," and a celebratory show at Joe's Pub. (212-967-7555.)

Film Forum presents a three-week program of B musicals.



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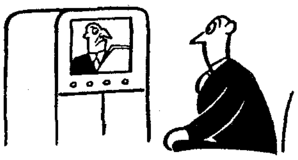
THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

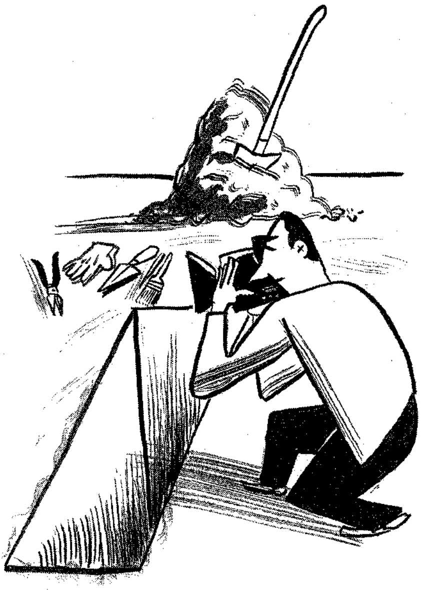
COMMENT
REMAINS OF THE DAYS



Last week, our attention turned, collectively, to the problem of what ought to be done with the remains of one recognized even among nonbelievers as at least semi-divine—one who had, despite a complicated paternity, transformed our consciousness, and whose life, retold as a series of parables, has proved an enduring source of solace, guidance, and fascination. Also last week, someone claimed to have found the tomb where Jesus was buried.

These twin cable-television disputes formed an odd and yet touching counterpoint: the first dispute was, of course, over the body of Anna Nicole Smith, the former jeans model and oil millionaire's wife whose untimely death caused an unseemly tussle between her mother and her boyfriend over where she ought to be buried. The second involved the revelation, keyed to the launch of a book and a television documentary—produced by James Cameron, the director of "Titanic" (and, while we're at it, the much better "Aliens" and "The Abyss")—of a group of ossuaries, in Jerusalem, that are said to be the last resting place of Jesus and his family. This set off an unseemly tussle between Cameron and those who doubted that the ossuaries had ever held Jesus or anyone he knew.

The argument over Anna Nicole Smith's remains focussed on the question of her intentions, and had as its central figure a Florida judge, right out of a Carl Hiassen novel, who was enjoying his brief moment of attention enough to want to draw the thing out, it seemed, beyond the point of putrefaction. The argument about the identity of the Jerusalem tomb focussed on a question of names and their frequency. The tombs were marked with the names Jesus, son of Joseph; Joseph (possibly a brother); Mary (conceivably a mother); Judah (perhaps a son); and Mariamene or Mariamne, who is alleged to be Mary Magdalene. Skeptics hold that these names occurred about as frequently in first-century Jerusalem as the names Emma, Jacob, and Dylan do on the Upper West Side today; believers insist that this spray of names would almost never show up by chance, particularly with the unusual form of "Mary" thrown in. "It's like finding a John, a Paul, and a George, and you don't leap to the obvious conclusion. . . unless you found a Ringo," Cameron remarked triumphantly.



The two overlapping stories may have in them something more than mere exploitation; the tears the judge shed for Anna Nicole, though shed for the camera, were real tears. The obsession with burial and what to do with bodies when life has fled is a defining human trait, as much a subject of poetry and epic as love or jealousy or war. It is the central point of the Iliad: not Achilles' wrath but Priam's decision to go and beg for the mutilated body of his son, Hector. It is the motive of Sophocles' "Antigone," in which everything turns on a sister's desire to have her dead brother buried, not "left unwept, unsepulchred." And it has haunted our own time in the search for M.I.A.s in Vietnam, the silent rituals at Ground Zero, and the anguish over the refusal to show the return of the war dead from Iraq. It is irrational—we ought to fuss more about babies than about bodies, more about keeping people alive than about what to do with their envelopes after life has left them—but it is always there, the disposition of the dead being the obsession of the living. "It is the dead / Not the living, who make the longest de-

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

mands/We die forever," Antigone bluntly explains.

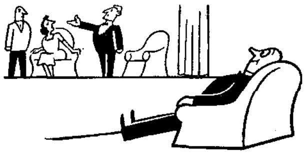
Though man has lost his claim to uniqueness as a toolmaker, war planner, and even serial murderer, there is a case, made at length by paleontologists, that humans are still unique in having burial rituals for their fellows, or friends, or fashion models. Even Neanderthal man may have buried his dead, dusted with ochre and possibly sprinkled with flowers, a thing no other animal on earth had done before. Man is no longer the toolmaker but the gravedigger, arguing for all time in a Florida courtroom or a Roman imperial city about what to do with what's left of us.

One reason we have a Christian religion is that there were no remains. Jesus' story is one of tragic defeat until, in Matthew, the women visit the tomb and find not something but nothing. What was moving about the so-called Jesus tomb, whoever is in it, is that here was a family tomb rescued from oblivion after two thousand years. A group of people who shared ties of kinship, affection, aggravation, and mutual dislike had vanished, and yet they remained. We know their names and can test, for whatever reasons, their DNA. Even if this is the only kind of immortality they have, it's enough; it's all we'll get, too.

"King Lear" is playing in New York at the moment, and one can see the mad, sad king carry his dead daughter onstage and cry out at the horror that a thing filled with life and obstinacy a few hours before is now as mute as a stone container. She was there, somehow; and now, somehow, she isn't. So where is she? Anna Nicole, or at least her earthly wrapper, is in the Bahamas, resting in peace at last.

—*Adam Gopnik*

ENDURANCE DEPT.
EXTREME THEATRE



The Web site for the New York City Marathon lists the following tips: invest in good running shoes and lightweight clothing; consume plenty of fluids; pace yourself. When Henry Bergstein showed up at Lincoln Center on the morning of February 24th, for a different sort of marathon—nine hours of "The Coast of Utopia," Tom Stoppard's epic drama about a circle of nineteenth-century Russian intellectuals—he had made only one preparation. "I wore special underwear," he said. "It's antibacterial underwear that has special breathing ability."

It was twenty minutes to eleven, and Bergstein was about to settle into seat H207 at the Vivian Beaumont. Though the three parts of the trilogy—"Voyage," "Shipwreck," and "Salvage"—had been running in repertory, this was the first of several days on which all three could be seen in one sitting. In anticipation of only three intermissions and two meal breaks, many of the thousand and fifty souls who braved the performance had taken precautions against all sorts of potential difficulties, including hunger, drowsiness, bad breath, and lack of familiarity with the central characters (who include Alexander Herzen, Michael Bakunin, and Vissarion Belinsky) and the women who dote, cheat, and die on them.

Outside the theatre, Gail Perlman (seat G109) and her sister-in-law, Carol Perlman (G108), were waiting for Carol's husband, Al, and their two children, Michael and Sharon. They were excited, like climbers at the foot of Mt. Kilimanjaro.

"We love theatre," said one.

"We love theatre," said the other.

"We have a passion for theatre."

The family arrived, along with their friend Michael DiPitro (G110), who was toting a large black bag. "We've got energy bars, candy, fruit, yogurt, breath mints, cough drops, gum, toothpaste, aspirin, sunglasses," he said. "I got tissues. I got hand gel. I got eyedrops in case my eyes get tired. I got cologne in case the people behind us stink. I got floss. I got cinnamon toast."

"It's like we're going on a fifteen-hour flight," Sharon said.

A chime was heard. It was time to file in for "Voyage." Alan Mark (L402), a consultant from San Francisco, had come by himself, as had the ticket holder of L403, John Glover, the actor who plays Lex Luthor's father on "Smallville." Glover climbed over Mark to get to his seat. They became fast friends. Mark realized that he'd seen Glover twice in "Love! Valour! Compassion!," in the mid-nineties. They had both packed Ricolas.

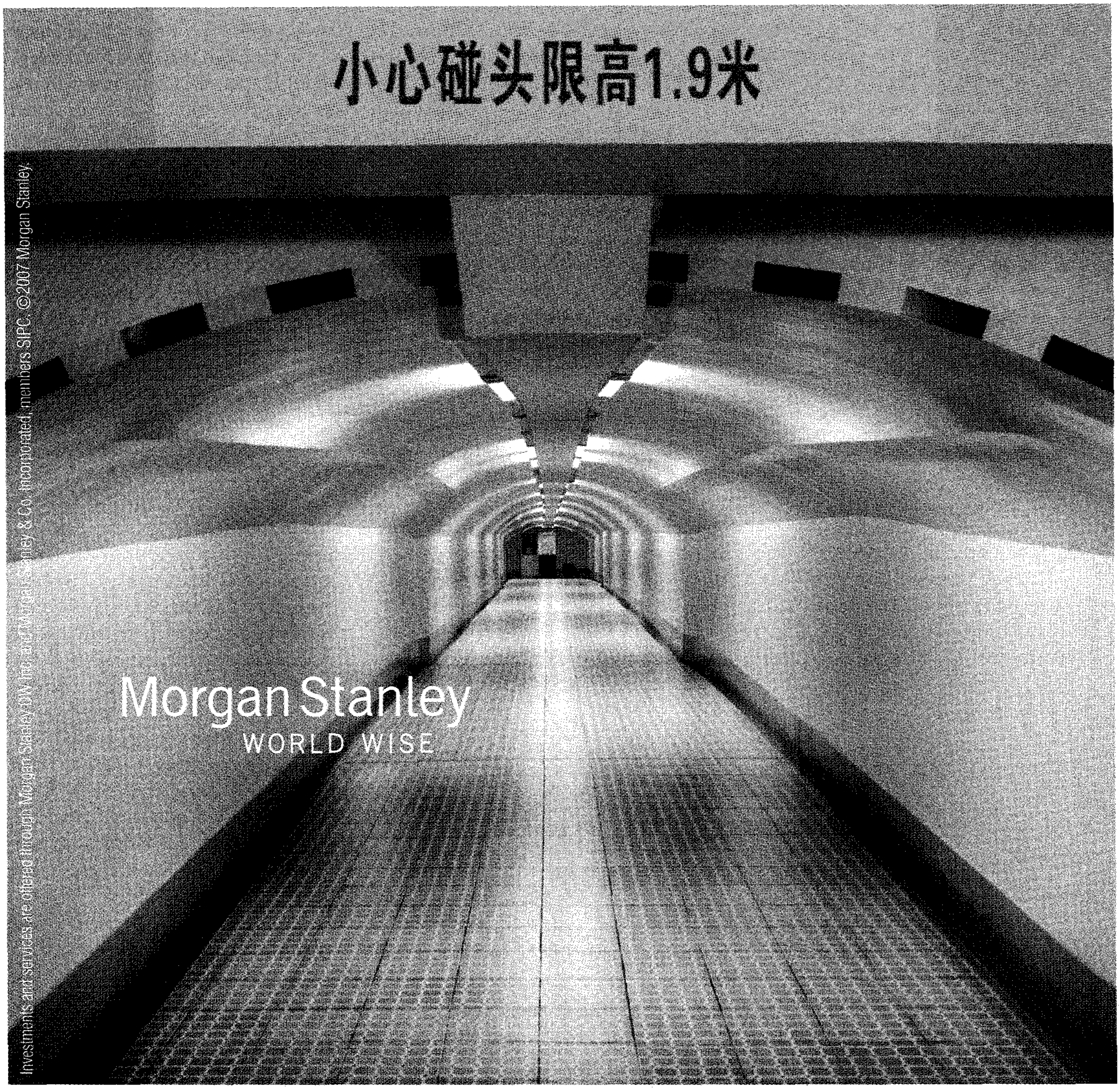
By the end of "Voyage," several things had happened: a human-size ginger cat had made an enigmatic cameo, Alexander Pushkin had been shot, Herzen had been exiled to Siberia, the sun had set in Russia, and Mark and Glover had exchanged numbers. "Call me if you're ever in L.A.," Glover said. It was 1:39 P.M.: lunchtime.

The crowd dispersed. Some went across the street to O'Neals' for the "Coast of Utopia" prix-fixe menu; others sat in the lobby, pulling sandwiches out of their handbags. There were several theories about what the ginger cat represented: "reality," "aristocracy," "the unknown," "change," "the West." A woman named Alice (F107) said, "I don't get baffled. I'm here to enjoy it. I don't break brains." She bit off a piece of *Knäckebrot*. "I've seen Eugene O'Neill: five hours in a theatre, on just a candy bar. I've sat through 'Don Carlo': four hours without a cigarette. And I don't get up and stretch like the young people do. I'm eighty. I'm eighty, and I was a roller-skater."

"Shipwreck," which began at half past three, hopscotched through the eighteen-forties and moved from Russia to Germany and on to Paris. At 4:17 P.M., the monarchy of Louis Philippe fell. At 4:41, it was intermission again. Row L expressed some puzzlement: there had been two Natalies and five Nicholases, and at least one of them was dead. Act II began. At 5:04, a cell phone rang. At 5:26, Herzen moved to Italy. At 5:55, he left. At 5:56, another cell phone rang. It was 1852. "Shipwreck" was over. The sun had set in New York.

Across Broadway, the waiting list at O'Neals' was more than seventy names long. Glover had invited a few people over for Chinese food; he was staying near Lincoln Center at the apartment of a friend, the actress Carol Kane. Mark was there, as was Scott Peacock, a chef (B311, loge). There was some sorting out of plot points ("So which Nicholas died?"). Then Glover got a call. It was from Jason Butler Harner, who plays Ivan Turgenev.

"Jason, hi! We're eating takeout from Shun Lee and trying to figure out who's dead. The show is great." He listened



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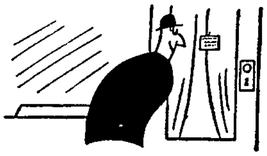
for a moment. "Nah, we're just sitting on our asses, babe. You're the ones doing all the work."

As people took their seats for "Salvage," a sense of fatigue crept in. The lights came up on London in 1853. By 8:46 P.M., Tsar Nicholas was dead. At 10:07, the Russian serfs were liberated. Backs were sore. Legs were cramping. At 10:29, someone tried to assassinate Tsar Alexander II. At 10:46, the curtain call began. At 10:48, it ended.

—*Michael Schulman*

LOST AND FOUND DEPT.
REVOLVING DOOR



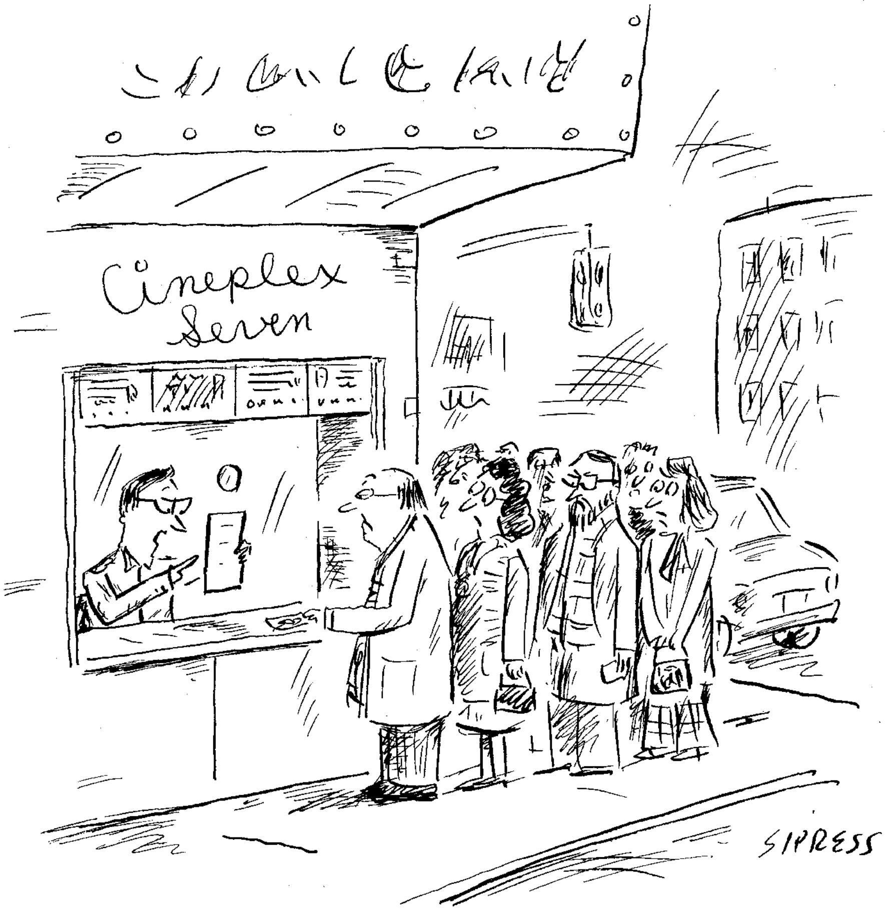
New York, unlike the great capitals of Europe, has always been a city of reinvention. Manhattan schist excavated during the construction of the subway finds new life as an apartment building on Riverside Drive; meat lockers on Gansevoort Street become expensive shoe salons; an Art Deco bar, abandoned in Murray Hill, is transformed in 1980 when it's relocated, like a Lego block, to a new restaurant in Tribeca called the Odeon.

Evan Blum, who runs the architectural-salvage shop Demolition Depot (and who facilitated the Odeon transfer for Keith McNally), is the city's recycler-in-chief. He is the major dealer in "vintage doors." On the third floor of his warehouse, on 125th Street, below bathtubs and above stained glass, he keeps thousands of them on display: "single French doors," "double French doors," "doors with glass," "rear doors," "entrance doors," "sets of doors." At his shop recently, he said, "They don't look special, but more people have a need for ordinary doors than you could imagine. This is a very important service to New York."

A few of Blum's favorite doors line the shop's stairwell. On the ground floor are two pairs of elegantly inlaid wooden doors from the Palmer mansion, in Chicago ($50,000 for the set), and an Upper East Side town-house door whose iron trimmings were painted bronze in the Second World War to avoid detection during scrap-metal drives ($8,500). Another door, made of wood, with a window of thick frosted glass, leans against a nearby bannister. On it is printed "Office of the Chancellor, Joel I. Klein," in black-and-gold-leaf lettering. Blum calls Joel Klein's door "an artifact of current interest," and, therefore, it is available only for rental. ("I thought people might find it useful for photo shoots," Blum said.) Blum is reasonably sure that he rented it once, briefly and at a "nominal price," but he can't recall when or to whom.

Klein's door comes from the tenth floor (Room 1010, it says) of 110 Livingston Street, in Brooklyn, the former headquarters of the Department of Education, where Klein worked for only two weeks, in 2002, before the department moved to the Tweed Courthouse. Blum picked over the interior of 110 Livingston Street, which was designed by McKim, Mead & White, two summers ago, and came away not only with the Chancellor's door but with the department's washroom fixtures ("vintage plumbing," he calls it), wavy-glass office partitions, and marble bathroom stalls. "It seemed so thoughtless that it was left behind," he said, facing the door and admiring the stylized serif font.

At the Tweed Courthouse, Klein's name does not appear on any of the doors, which is the way he prefers it. "Moving from 110 Livingston to Tweed was like moving from the catacombs to the cathedral," he said recently, while sitting in his office (Room 320) and looking out through a pair of open doors—"mahogany, with the interior third or twenty-five per cent occupied by the kind of glass that you can't see through"—at a room that had a few dozen desks. "No. 110 was a very smothering internal environment," he said. "There were all these little Balkanized offices. You can measure the dysfunctionality of most organizations by the number of closed



"In that film, the two leading actors are for Obama, but the director and the producer support Clinton."

doors. There's this door mythology."

Klein's recollection of the Livingston Street door is that it was similar to his door at the Justice Department, where he once worked, only uglier. "How much is he asking?" Klein wondered.

The Demolition Depot is not well heated, and Blum wore a jacket, gloves, and a trapper hat as he proceeded up the stairs and passed a variety of other artifacts: Oscar Hammerstein's office chandelier, a bronze panel from a domed ceiling at the Toy Building, backdrops from a defunct Chinese theatre under the Manhattan Bridge. (Blum says that Julian Schnabel, a longtime collector of Blum's vintage J. L. Mott bathtubs, has expressed interest in one of the backdrops, for the purpose of painting over it. Blum won't sell.) He stopped on the third-floor landing, where a few large panels of corrugated glass—more bounty from 110 Livingston—were propped in a corner. The panels, he explained, fit together to make an interior office cubicle—one of the "little Balkanized offices" that Klein lamented. "B. D. Wong wants it in the worst way for his loft downtown," Blum said, referring to the actor from "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit." Wong has not expressed any interest in Joel Klein's door.

—*Ben McGrath*

DEAR DIARY

BRITISH IMPORT

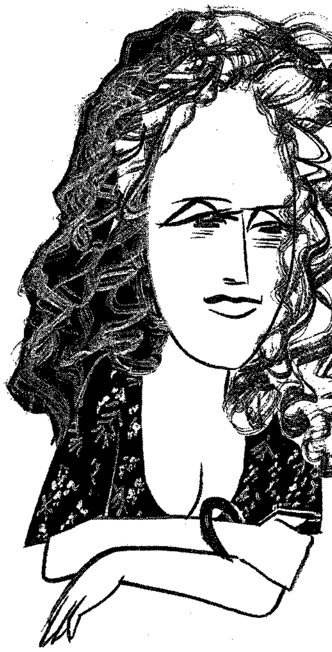
In late 2003, Zoe Margolis read her first blog, Belle de Jour, which purports to be the diary of a London call girl. "She wrote about her working life of sex for money, and that wasn't my story," Margolis said the other day. "But I realized that there were all these thoughts and feelings I had about female sexuality that I never saw expressed anywhere else." So Margolis started her own blog, which she named Girl with a One-Track Mind: Diary of a Sex Fiend.

Margolis, who is thirty-four, was born and brought up in London, and is an aspiring filmmaker. Most recently, she was an assistant director on "Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix," which will be released this summer. Her friends and colleagues knew nothing of the blog. "Since there was the shield of anonymity, I thought I could say anything. I wrote things I wouldn't tell my best friend," she said. The blog's voice—cheerfully neurotic, unapologetically political—was distinctive from the start. Regarding one memorable romp, the Girl mused, "Here was I, a feminist, a believer of equality in every realm, and a man wanted me to take all the control? I wasn't quite sure about that." (She gets sure.)

Margolis was soon drawing ten thousand visitors a day. In the summer of 2005, an agent suggested that the Girl turn her stories into a book. Working through intermediaries and a trusted lawyer, Margolis signed a contract that would, she thought, allow for publication of the book while keeping her anonymity intact. As a nom de plume, she chose Abby Lee.

Last August, a few days after "Girl with a One-Track Mind: Confessions of the Seductress Next Door" was published, her doorbell in London rang. "There was a guy with a bunch of flowers for me," she said. "To sign for them, he made me kneel out the front door in a very awkward way. It was just strange." The next day, she learned that the flower delivery had been a ruse, concocted by the *Sunday Times*, to take her photograph for a story that would identify her as the author of the book and the blog. "They started e-mailing and calling me the next day, saying that I should give them an interview and pose for pictures, or they would identify me and run the pictures, which they said were 'unflattering,' " Margolis said. "Then they threatened to publish information about my parents, who knew nothing of any of this." (Although Margolis had unintentionally dropped some hints about her identity in the blog—her shoe size, her occupation—she still doesn't know how the *Times* figured it out.)

Panicked, Margolis told her parents about the threat and offered to coöperate with the reporters to spare her mother, a psychoanalyst, and her father, a management consultant, any involvement. "My mum said, 'Fuck 'em. Don't do anything on our account,' " she said. (Her mother read one entry of the blog, then stopped, because she didn't want to violate her daughter's privacy.) Bowing to the inevitable, Margolis decided to give an interview to the *Guardian*, to spite her pursuers at other publications.



Zoe Margolis

Rather than douse the controversy, the *Guardian* story generated interest in Margolis's blog and in her book, which became a best-seller in Britain. Rights to the book have been sold in ten countries, and Margolis arrived in New York last week to launch the American edition, which is entitled "Diary of a Sex Fiend," apparently to appeal to a more coarsened book-buying market. ("I hate that title," she said.) Margolis has unruly chesnut-colored hair, a forthright manner, and mixed feelings about the whole experience, which has, among other things, transformed the blog that started it all. "It's absolutely not possible to write the way I used to, because it doesn't feel ethical," she said. "I can't express myself as openly." She is thinking of starting a new blog. "That's the only way I can return to the catharsis of anonymous writing."

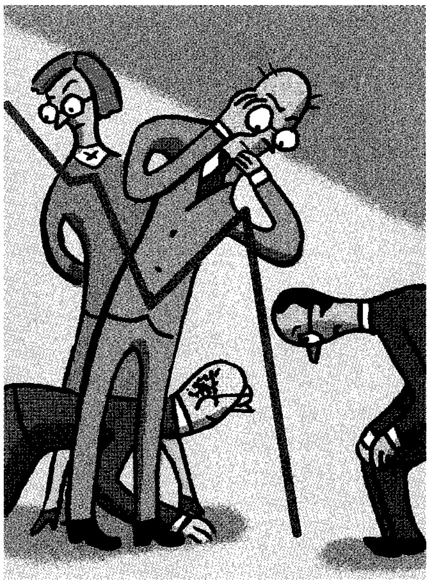
—*Jeffrey Toobin*

THE FINANCIAL PAGE
REASONABLE PANIC

After last Tuesday's stock-market rout, which sent the Dow Jones average down more than four hundred points and erased more than half a trillion dollars of market value, Wall Street analysts and reporters quickly found a culprit: China. The Shanghai stock market had plummeted almost nine per cent before the U.S. market opened, supposedly raising concerns about the health of the Chinese economy and spooking U.S. investors. Other explanations were floated as well. Alan Greenspan had given a speech the day before warning of the possibility of recession. The government reported a sharp decline in durable-goods orders, suggesting that U.S. manufacturing was slowing down, and there were discouraging numbers from the housing market. All in all, it was a day with its fair share of bad news. At first glance, however, it didn't seem like bad news that was worth half a trillion dollars. So was the whole thing just a temporary fit of hypochondria? Did investors sniffle a few times and then all decide they were coming down with avian flu?

Some of the decline can certainly be attributed to some less than rational investor behavior. The slump in the Shanghai stock market, for instance, while precipitous, was, from the perspective of the U.S. economy, a non-event. For all the talk about the integration of global markets, there is very little foreign money invested in the Shanghai Stock Exchange, thanks to government regulations. Furthermore, the Shanghai sell-off appears to have been driven not by doubts about the well-being of China's economy but by local anxieties about possible new measures designed to curb speculation—something that would make no difference to American corporations. But the sell-off dominated pre-market news on Tuesday, and so investors were effectively given the message that China's problems really were America's.

This caused problems, because, as economists have found, investors often overvalue new information, particularly when it's presented in dramatic fashion. In one famous experiment by the psychologist Paul Andreassen, investors who selected a portfolio of stocks and then saw nothing but the stocks' changing prices managed their portfolios significantly better than investors who were also given a stream of news about the companies they'd invested in. The reason, Andreassen suggested, was that the media's tendency to overplay stories led investors to place too much weight on news that turned out to be of only transient importance. This doesn't mean that investors should be kept in the dark—indeed, markets work best when participants are drawing information from many diverse sources—but when a single story like the Shanghai sell-off captures everyone's attention investors will often overreact. This effect is magnified by the prevalence of short-term and momentum trading in today's stock market. If an investor thinks a piece of news has a chance of causing a sell-off, he is likely to respond by selling, too, thereby feeding the frenzy he anticipated.



MARC ROSENTHAL

Some of Tuesday's drama, then, was the result of a mild bout of investor hysteria. But it's likely that much of it had more sensible underpinnings. While the past few years have been exceptionally good for American companies, with interest rates and labor costs low, and profits at historic highs, a host of potentially huge risks continue to loom, including the threat of terrorism, America's huge current-account deficit, and the possibility of a slowdown provoked by the end of the housing boom. If investors collectively decided that there was a slightly greater chance of even one of these risks becoming reality, that could have provoked the market decline we saw on Tuesday.

It may seem unlikely that a small change in investor expectations could lead to such a big sell-off. But stock-market investors are trying to predict how much money companies are going to make over the next fifteen or twenty years. Over a period that long, relatively small changes in the present can have huge effects. A ten-billion-dollar company that grows at ten per cent a year for twenty years, for instance, will be, at the end of that period, twenty billion dollars bigger than if it had grown at eight per cent a year. So while big market swings in reaction to poor earnings news or bad economic data often seem exaggerated, evidence suggests that they often turn out to be justified. For instance, a new paper by the economists Borja Larrain and Motohiro Yogo that looked at U.S. companies from 1926 to 2004 found that the movements of companies' stock prices followed changes in their expected cash flow. And a new simulation by three British economists shows that even a stock market made up of investors who are rationally adjusting their forecasts of future business cycles will generate the kinds of volatile price changes that you see in real stock markets. In other words, even when investors are sensible their collective activity is quite capable of occasionally sending the market down four per cent in a day.

It's a mistake to read sharp declines as portents of certain doom—investors are saying that there's a better chance of bad things happening, not that those things will happen. Although that may not be exactly comforting news, in some sense Tuesday's sell-off was paradoxically reassuring. Academics and policymakers have been arguing for a while now that investors are foolishly indifferent to the risks facing the global economy. But last week's sell-off suggests that in the stock market, at least, investors are all too sensitive to the many things that can go wrong. The effects of last Tuesday may have been painful, but in the long run, this is probably good news. In a risky world, it's better to have wary investors than reckless ones.

—James Surowiecki

MAJOR NATIONAL BESTSELLER!

Photo: John Madere

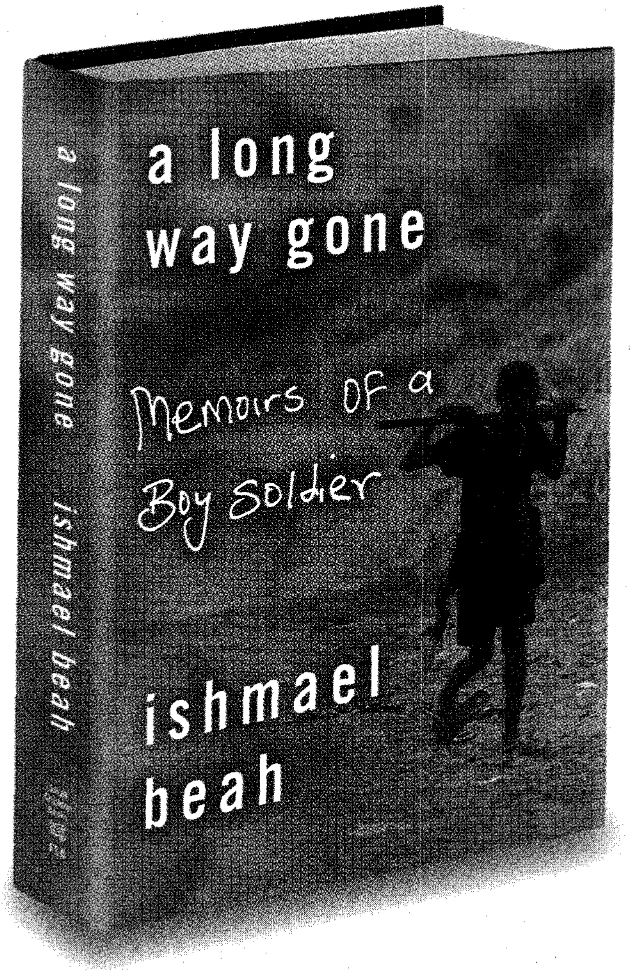
"Breathtaking . . .

Ishmael Beah [is] the literary-humanitarian equivalent of a rock star."

—Belinda Luscombe, *Time*

"Unique . . . The first time that a child soldier has been able to give literary voice to one of the most distressing phenomena of the late 20th century."

—William Boyd, *The New York Times Book Review*



"Gripping."
—Carol Huang, *The Christian Science Monitor*

"Important."
—John Corry, *The Wall Street Journal*

"Uplifting."
—Liza Nelson, *People*

"Compelling."
—Gilbert Cruz, *Entertainment Weekly*

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ANNALS OF SCIENCE

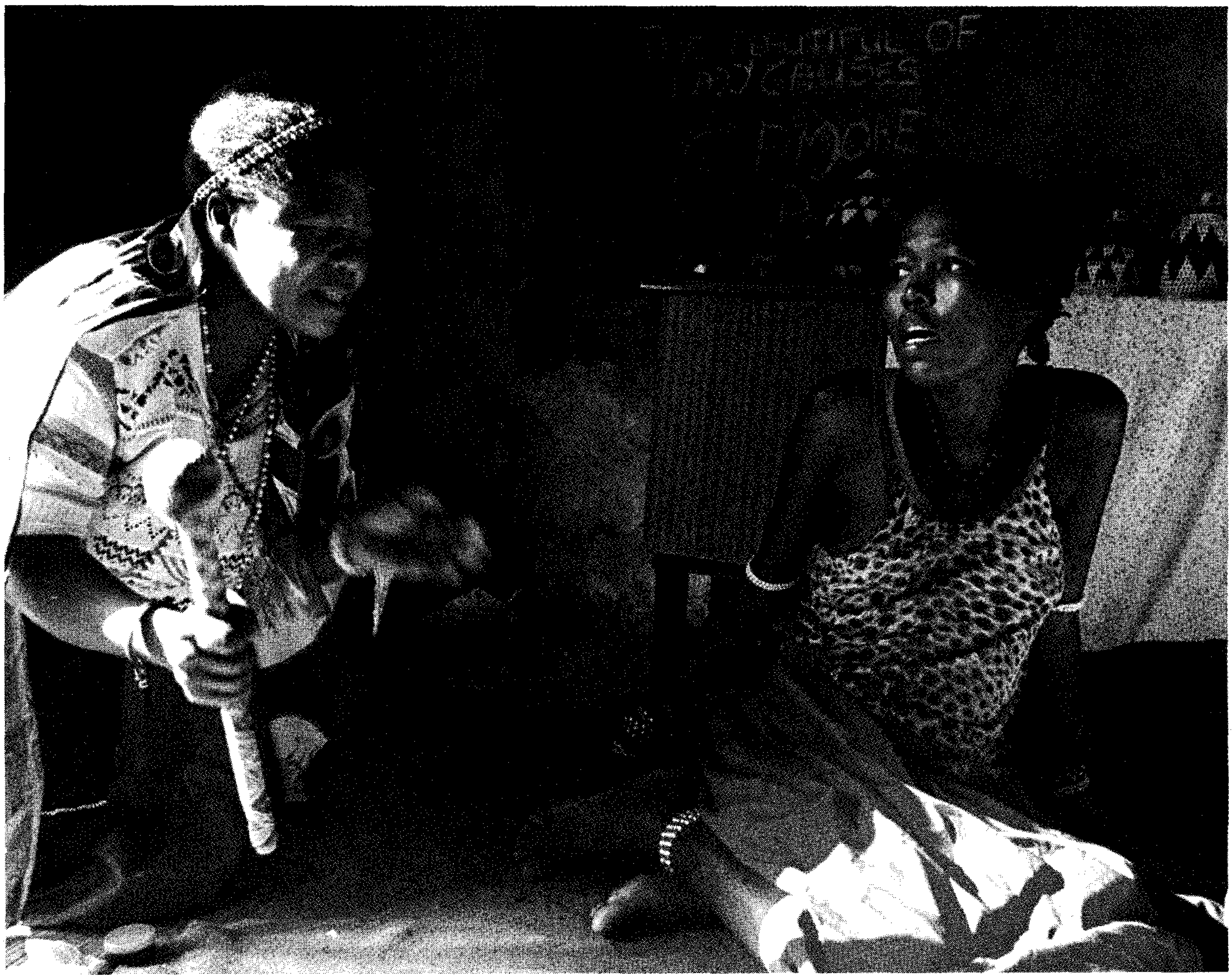
THE DENIALISTS

The dangerous attacks on the consensus about H.I.V. and AIDS.

BY MICHAEL SPECTER

Zeblon Gwala is a husky forty-nine-year-old man with an unusually vivid dream life. For many years, he worked as a long-haul truck driver, criss-crossing South Africa from his base, in Durban. But he is in a different business now. A few years ago, Gwala began to dream about herbs. Some nights he would see just one, on others two or three. Gwala's grandfather, who died when he was a boy, was a traditional village healer, and in the dreams he would tell Gwala which herbs to collect and where to get them. Gwala kept a list next to his bed, and eventually, when it had grown to eighty-nine, his grandfather instructed him to divide the herbs into two groups and boil each batch. The resulting concoctions, the apparition assured him, would cure AIDS, the disease that was destroying his country. Gwala followed instructions. He quit his job, turned his garage into a factory, and opened a storefront dispensary in downtown Durban, wedged between a dry cleaner and a furniture store. He hung two signs next to the door: one has "Doctor Gwala" written on it, and the other says "H.I.V. and AIDS Clinic." There are no doctors, nurses, or medical technicians at this particular clinic, and just one product: ubhejane, which is the Zulu word for black rhinoceros. Every day, from eight in the morning until four—unless he runs out first—Gwala sells ubhejane in litre-sized milk containers. There are two kinds. The bottle with a white lid holds an herbal mixture intended to rebuild an immune system ravaged by the AIDS virus. The second, with a blue lid, is a potion to reduce the amount of the virus that has already accumulated in the bloodstream.

On a typical day, as many as a hundred people come to Gwala's clinic, each paying the equivalent of about a hundred dollars—nearly two weeks' pay—for a thirty-day supply. Gwala says that the medicine never fails. He also says that he has no idea how it works. "Ubhejane protects the cells from any virus," he told me when I met with him at his clinic, last



As prominent South African politicians dismiss antiretroviral drugs as "poison," traditional healers have flourished.

fall. "I don't know how that happens. I am not a scientist. But what I do know is that people who were on the edge of death go back to work. It makes them feel better, and it gives them life."

The use of ubhejane has been encouraged by President Thabo Mbeki's Health Minister, Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, and by the Director-General of Health, Thami Mseleku. The health minister in the province of KwaZulu-Natal has also spoken in favor of the remedy, and the mayor of Durban has supplied funds to buy it for patients at a hospice not far from the city. Ubhejane's most vigorous promoter, a retired professor of sociology named Herbert Vilakazi, says that antiretroviral drugs, or A.R.V.s—which have proved to be the only successful treatment for the millions of people infected with H.I.V.—are so toxic that they can cause more harm than good. Like Mbeki himself, he seems to be convinced that a genuine cure for AIDS is more likely to be found in the arsenal of traditional African medicine than in any chemical compound sold by a Western pharmaceutical company. For years, Vilakazi, Mbeki, and Tshabalala-Msimang have used words like "damaging," "toxic," and "poison" to describe A.R.V.s.

Ubhejane is far from the first untested remedy that South African leaders have recommended to AIDS patients. Virodene, a powerful industrial solvent with no medicinal value, was embraced by Mbeki and his comrades as soon as it was introduced by South African researchers, in 1997. More recently, Secomet V, an extract from red clover, made a splash in the market. It is sold as Ithemba Lesizwe—Hope of the Nation. Minister Tshabalala-Msimang, whose antipathy toward pharmaceutical AIDS treatments has long been an international scandal, has never wavered in her support for such remedies. Last summer, she astonished participants at an international AIDS conference in Toronto by presenting a government public-health display that focussed on beetroot, olive oil, garlic, lemons, and African potatoes. Antiretroviral drugs were included only after furious protests.

Denying the scientific consensus about what causes AIDS and how to treat it is not limited to South Africa, of course. H.I.V. itself is now on trial before the Supreme Court of South Australia. Last year, a thirty-five-year-old man who had unprotected sex with three women—and infected one—despite knowing that he was H.I.V.-positive, was found guilty of endangering their lives. He has appealed, saying that H.I.V. does not cause illness. His main witness is Eleni Papadopulos-Eleopulos, a medical physicist at Royal Perth Hospital, who claims that H.I.V. has nothing to do with AIDS. The Perth Group, as she and several other Australian H.I.V. denialists are known, has argued for more than twenty years that the virus has never been isolated or identified properly. Papadopulos-Eleopulos and her colleagues insist that AIDS in gay men results from drug abuse and repeated exposure to semen. Last month, the President of Gambia, Yahya Jammeh, disclosed that he had found a secret remedy for AIDS and asthma, and announced that he would begin to cure AIDS on Thursdays and asthma on Saturdays.

AIDS denial plays a corrosive role in the health policies of many countries, but nowhere has the damage been as extreme or as enduring as in South Africa. Five and a half million of the country's forty-eight million people are infected with H.I.V., which makes South Africa by any epidemiological standard the country with the world's deadliest AIDS epidemic. Nearly a thousand people there die of AIDS every day, and at least twice that many are newly infected. Between 1997 and 2004, death rates from infectious diseases more than tripled for men and increased fivefold for women—from numbers that were already among the worst in the world. The country, while not rich, has sub-Saharan Africa's largest economy, and it is one of the few on the continent that could genuinely afford to administer an antiretroviral-drug regimen that would cover those people who need it. Today, only about two hundred thousand receive the drugs.

Recently, there have been hints that the government might be open to a new approach. Last fall, South Africa's Deputy President, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, a progressive and measured leader, emerged as the government's most prominent spokesman on AIDS—in part, it seemed, because Mbeki's Health Minister, Tshabalala-Msimang, had been seriously ill. Ever since her appointment, in 1999, Tshabalala-Msimang has been one of the world's most polarizing

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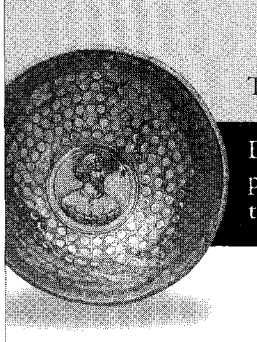

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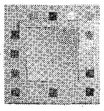

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and controversial public-health officials. She and her husband, Mendi Msimang, a senior official in the African National Congress—the country's ruling party—became close to Mbeki in the nineteen-sixties, when the A.N.C. was exiled in Zambia.

Mlambo-Ngcuka's new role has been greeted with caution, because Mbeki has inched away from AIDS denialism in the past. In 2002, the cabinet took the unusual step of officially affirming that H.I.V. causes AIDS. The next year, the government issued a comprehensive—and forward-looking—AIDS policy for the country. It has never been fully implemented, however. The cabinet also instructed Tshabalala-Msimang to make AIDS medications available to the public. She began doing so only after South Africa's highest court ruled that she must, and the pace has been slow. Mbeki, an economist who is one of Africa's most respected leaders, has never disavowed the view that H.I.V. medicines are Western inventions aimed at maiming Africans. In 2000, news reports said that Mbeki had hinted at C.I.A. involvement in propagating the belief that H.I.V. causes AIDS.

With government encouragement, clinics like Gwala's are thriving. The day I was there, an old woman walked in carrying a baby girl wrapped in a blanket, like a papoose, on her back. The baby's mother died of AIDS shortly after giving birth. The father died of AIDS before she was born. "I am what she has left," the woman—her grandmother—told me. "Everyone else is dead." She said that she was at the clinic because she believes in President Mbeki and suspects that Western drugs won't save her granddaughter; she knows too many people who have died.

"The people who want to take those A.R.V.s can take them," Gwala told me as we watched his wife hand out bottle after bottle of ubhejane. "But they don't cure anything. The side effects are like poison, and people get sicker. Ubhejane doesn't hurt anyone. And it works. I can feel it. I know I am not a scientist. But look at these people. They have hope now and before they had nothing."

In 1987, three years after French and American scientists announced that AIDS was caused by the human immunodeficiency virus, an eminent molecular biologist named Peter Duesberg published a paper in the journal *Perspectives in Cancer Research* entitled "Retroviruses as Carcinogens and Pathogens: Expectations and Reality," in which he argued that H.I.V. cannot cause AIDS. Duesberg grew up in Germany and was educated there and in Switzerland. He was among the first to discover, in the nineteen-seventies, that a particular class of viruses—a type of retrovirus—carries genes capable of transforming normal cells into cancer cells. Duesberg's research established his international reputation and helped him win tenure at the University of California at Berkeley. In 1986, he was invited to join the National Academy of Sciences, and he was even mentioned as a possible recipient of the Nobel Prize.

Without Duesberg's research, there might have been no significant progress in treating AIDS. In the nineteen-eighties, Robert Gallo, the American scientist who shares a negotiated credit with the French virologist Luc Montagnier for discovering the AIDS virus, had high praise for Duesberg. Introducing him at a scientific conference in 1984, he said, "He was among the first, or perhaps even the very first," to characterize the structure of the viruses. "He was involved in the first work that provided a genetic map of retroviruses."

Retroviruses can cause several illnesses, including some cancers, but it wasn't until 1983, when French scientists conducted a biopsy on the lymph nodes of a gay man who had suddenly become sick, that antibodies from a retrovirus were found. For more than a hundred years, the presence of antibodies against any disease had been interpreted as good news: antibodies are proteins that the immune system uses to fend off attacks by viruses and bacteria as they circulate in the bloodstream; if you have antibodies against chicken pox or measles, it means that your immune system is ready to fight the virus. That is how most vaccines work: they train blood cells to secrete the specific antibodies needed to recognize and overcome an infection. But H.I.V. is an entirely new kind of virus, one that doesn't simply attack our cells. It takes control of the entire immune system. At first, scientists wondered if the disease was related solely to the life styles of those who fell ill. By 1984, however, the correlation between infection with H.I.V. and the development of AIDS in humans had become hard to ignore. "Wherever H.I.V. was found, AIDS was present or soon present," Gallo wrote in "Virus Hunting," his 1991 book about the discovery of AIDS. "Conversely, no H.I.V.—no AIDS." Thousands of subsequent studies support this contention. Other illnesses, like malaria and tuberculosis, can hasten the decline of a person who is infected, and so can poor nutrition. But if you don't have H.I.V. you can't have AIDS.

Just as most scientists became convinced that H.I.V. was the cause of the epidemic, however, and as, for the first time, a drug, AZT, was shown to interfere with the virus directly, Peter Duesberg insisted that H.I.V. had nothing to do with the disease. In his initial paper, in 1987, and in more than a dozen since, Duesberg has argued that H.I.V. is harmless, a mere "passenger" virus—one of the thousands of organisms that live within and among us, never causing damage or requiring us even to notice that they exist. "To pretend to think that H.I.V. causes AIDS is politically correct, socially attractive, and very, very fundable," Duesberg told an interviewer not long ago, adding that even in "the freest of all countries, as George Bush calls the U.S., nonconformists are excommunicated at all social and scientific levels."

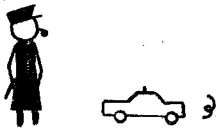
Duesberg argues that recreational drugs are what destroy the immune system, not a retrovirus. He believes that a virus cannot be the cause of an illness if the illness becomes evident only many years after the initial infection. Viruses typically make people sick shortly after infecting them, before their immune system can respond. With H.I.V., more than a decade can pass between the moment a person becomes infected and the time when he becomes visibly ill. Duesberg also has written that no virus can cause disease after the body starts to produce a neutralizing immune response.

Duesberg contends that to prevent AIDS—and even to cure the disease—it is necessary only to eat properly and abstain from harmful drug use. In 1998, he and one of his collaborators, David Rasnick, wrote, "All infectious epidemics of the past, such as polio, cholera, tuberculosis, smallpox and syphilis, have long been brought under control, or even eliminated, at a fraction of the cost of AIDS with technology that was far less sophisticated than what is available now." The focus on H.I.V., Rasnick later argued, is "the biggest scientific, medical blunder of the 20th century"; the tens of thousands of researchers who have devoted their lives to treating the virus have been wasting their time and billions of dollars.

Through force of will, Peter Duesberg essentially invented the AIDS dissident movement, and remains its most prominent proponent. For years, he has maintained that, since antibodies are generally signs that our immune system is doing its job, anybody who tests positive for H.I.V. ought to be happy. In 1988, in an effort to put Duesberg's theories to rest, the American Foundation for AIDS Research sponsored a scientific forum, in Washington, D.C., on the origins of the epidemic. One after another, researchers presented data linking the increase of H.I.V. infections around the world to the growing number of AIDS cases. Duesberg rejected the data completely. This was at a time when in the United States AIDS was still widely seen as a death sentence, and people had even committed suicide after learning that they were infected. Anthony Fauci, the federal government's leading AIDS expert, sat silently for hours. Usually the most circumspect of scientists, he finally erupted. "This is murder," he said after listening to Duesberg speak. "It's really just that simple."

Duesberg has come to expect responses like that. He was once asked how long it might take for the scientific establishment to recognize that it was wrong about H.I.V. He replied, "It took the highly established and affluent Catholic Church four hundred years to 'understand' Galileo." He went on to say that it might take the scientific establishment, "the Church of the twentieth/twenty-first century," at least that long.

The AIDS dissident community may be small, but its impact has not been. The climate in which medicine is practiced has changed dramatically since the beginning of the epidemic; medical authority is no longer revered, and pharmaceutical companies are increasingly portrayed as criminals. The Internet has made it possible for every conspiracy theory to flourish. There are three basic versions of the H.I.V.-denial credo. The first arises from Duesberg's conviction that H.I.V. does not cause AIDS. The second argues that, even if the virus is harmful, the risks of antiretroviral drugs far outweigh the benefits: AIDS drugs are poisons, pushed by doctors corrupted by the pharmaceutical industry. The "poison" argument has been proved untrue in hundreds of studies across the globe, among women, men, drug users, homosexuals, and infants. Finally, and most perniciously, there are those who argue that sub-Saharan Africa—where nearly two-thirds of H.I.V.-infected people live and as many as twenty million have died—simply has no AIDS epidemic. Instead, they blame the absence of proper nutrition or clean water—factors that certainly exacerbate the effects of AIDS but do not cause it. On the Internet, where anyone can profess to be an expert, rumor sites can make all these theories seem plausible, particularly to a new generation that has not been educated properly about the risks of H.I.V. One site, virusmyth.net, has more than a thousand Web pages attached to it, and its opening page features an illustration of the AIDS virus with dollars pouring out of it. There is a photograph of Thabo Mbeki and a call to arms: "Support President Mbeki to find the truth about AIDS."



Duesberg's influence gained new momentum when Mbeki, shortly after succeeding Nelson Mandela as President, in 1999, discovered his work while rooting around on the Internet. Mbeki has responded harshly when people criticize him for supporting Duesberg. "I am also amazed at how many people, who claim to be scientists, are determined that scientific discourse and inquiry should cease, because 'most of the world' is of one mind," Mbeki wrote in 2000. "By resort to the use of the modern magic wand at the disposal of modern propaganda machines, an entire regiment of eminent 'dissident' scientists is wiped out from the public view, leaving a solitary Peter Duesberg alone on the battlefield, insanely tilting at the windmills."

For Mbeki and many other South Africans whose world views were defined by their struggle with apartheid, it is understandably hard to see white men in lab coats as people who want to help them. In the past, many drugs and vaccines have been tested on Africans and proved effective only with their help. But the drugs are often far too expensive for African countries to acquire. Americans seek medical solutions to nearly every health problem—whether it's hair loss, cancer, AIDS, or one of the many diseases that stem from the fact that we eat too much. Mbeki argues that what his people need is decent food and clean water. "You can't say the response to a healthy human body is drugs," he told Parliament in 2004. "Your first response is proper feeding. The Minister of Health"—Tshabalala-Msimang—"repeats this thing every day and what do they do, they mock her. It's like she's some crazy person of the moon!"

Mbeki rarely addresses scientific solutions to the AIDS epidemic. Instead, he focusses on politics and the injustices done to Africans. In his first years in office, Mbeki was openly hostile to the idea of H.I.V. In 2000, after he appointed a Presidential advisory panel, which included Duesberg and other denialists, to study the cause of AIDS, he was so brutally repudiated by world leaders and public-health professionals that he essentially ceased talking about the issue. But, with Tshabalala-Msimang as his mouthpiece, Mbeki has since urged Africans to turn away from the medicine that most of the world has come to rely upon. Recently, though, when he appeared to be stepping back, and public-health officials were permitted to speak for the government, he also created a new commission on African traditional medicine, and chose as its leader Herbert Vilakazi, the South African academic who is notorious for his disdain for Western medicine.

Vilakazi is a retired professor of sociology who has taught at, among other places, the University of Cape Town, and he dresses the part: crisp blue blazer, button-down oxford shirt, light-gray pants. He lives in a well-appointed, book-filled house in one of Pretoria's more fashionable gated communities. He was born in Zululand, but spent his adolescent years in Hartford, Connecticut, and received his undergraduate degree from Columbia University. Vilakazi believes that the long traditions of African medicine have been ignored by Western scientists because Africans are black—an assessment that many scientists in and outside of Africa share. He goes further, however. "The West simply took it for granted that the mind of humanity was full of nothing but error, rubbish, nonsense, and superstition, until Whites emerged with a more superior mind," he wrote recently. "The West then proceeded, with amazing folly, to start accumulating modern scientific thought, using the famous 'scientific method' and the method of 'experiment,' formulated during the 'Scientific Revolution,' without paying the least respect to, *without building upon*, the knowledge accumulated by Africans, Asians, and Native Americans."

Vilakazi believes that Western society has turned the scientific method into a fetish. "Orthodox medicine has reached a dead end," he told me. "There is walking evidence and evidence that comes from a lab. There are plenty of people who rely on walking evidence. A person has terrible arthritic pains. An old man gives them herbs and they get relief. We can't say that the only thing that matters comes in reports from Western labs." Nobody denies that traditional remedies play an important role in medicine. Aspirin is a more modern form of willow bark, and thousands of other drugs have herbs as their base. Artemisinin, which when used in combination with other medicine is the best treatment available for malaria, is derived from an herb that the Chinese have relied upon for thousands of years. Nonetheless, most researchers would say that any potential medicine—herbal or chemical—needs to be subjected to the rigors of testing and analysis. Vilakazi disagrees. "Take Gwala, for example," he said. Vilakazi, who has no medical training, helped arrange for the former truck driver to meet senior government health officials, including Tshabalala-Msimang. He has also testified before Parliament on ubhejane's behalf. "I have personally seen hundreds of people who have taken ubhejane, and they get relief," he told me. "All I am saying is let's look at the results of that, as well as using drugs like A.R.V.s.

"The situation in America is one of intolerance," he continued, never raising his voice. "There are A.R.V.s. Only one approach to treating this deadly illness is permitted. You are not allowed to talk about anything else." He said that people are obsessed with whether H.I.V. causes AIDS, but that he considered such arguments "completely academic and not relevant for the treatment of sick people." He went on, "Let us be honest. Who benefits from A.R.V.s? Hundreds of millions of U.S. dollars have been spent on research and you have to get a return on your investment. It is the first rule of pharmaceutical companies, and they simply terrorize their opponents. Very frankly, in America there is an official literature—and there are a lot of people in the African-American community who feel maybe there is a conspiracy and that racism has a lot to do with it. Why, for instance, is AIDS the biggest problem that exists in Africa? You start to wonder if there is a social selection for this disease. Is it not a coincidence that Africa is the poorest continent in the world? Did you ever think that it's in the interest of some people for it to stay that way?"

One morning, I took a short ride from Cape Town to the region's largest township, Khayelitsha, to visit Marta Darder, a physician working there for Médecins Sans Frontières. It was a brisk day, and the flat expanse of Table Mountain was bathed in the cool light of the Southern Hemisphere, and so was the harbor, which was full of tourist boats and fishing trawlers.

For the past five years, Darder has fought to make sure that the township's half-million residents have access to the H.I.V. medicines that the government promises to supply. "We have seen so many people who claim to have a cure for AIDS," she told me. "Mostly, they were ignored. But there has never been anything here like Matthias Rath. His strategy, power, and connections were incredible. He knew how to play the business and the politics of South Africa."

Rath is a German physician and health entrepreneur who urges people to substitute remarkably high doses of multivitamins for proved therapies like AZT. He has offices in the United States, Germany, Holland, and South Africa. (Duesberg's co-author David Rasnick has worked with him in South Africa.) Rath believes that huge doses of vitamins and micronutrients—which he sells on the Internet—can treat AIDS (as well as heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and many other maladies). Rath has placed advertisements in several newspapers, including the New York *Times* and the *International Herald Tribune*, railing against pharmaceutical companies and urging people to stop using their products. His ads almost always appear beneath headlines like "Why Should South Africans Continue to Be Poisoned with AZT?" and "Stop AIDS Genocide by the Drug Cartel." On his Web site, which notes, "The End of the AIDS Epidemic Is in Sight," he declares:

> Never before in the history of mankind was a greater crime committed than the genocide organized by the pharmaceutical drug cartel in the interest of the multibillion-dollar investment business with disease. Hundreds of millions of people have died unnecessarily from AIDS, cancer, heart disease and other preventable diseases and the only reason that

> these epidemics are still haunting mankind is that they are the multibillion-dollar marketplace for the pharmaceutical drug cartel.

A couple of years ago, Rath began distributing his multivitamin products in some of the country's poorest townships, including Khayelitsha. According to doctors there, staff members advised H.I.V.-positive patients to refrain from taking antiretroviral drugs, and claimed that Rath's vitamins would cure them or prevent further illness. Rath has been criticized in public statements by many organizations, including UNAIDS, the South African Medical Association, and the Southern African H.I.V. Clinicians Society. In the United States, the F.D.A. has informed Rath that it considers advertisements on his Web site to be misleading.

I visited Rath's offices in Cape Town, which occupied two floors in one of the city's most expensive buildings. He wasn't there. I have tried to reach him on three continents, but neither he nor any of his associates has returned my calls or made him available for interviews. Shortly before this article was published, however, Rath began to place a series of lengthy letters to the editor of *The New Yorker* on his main Web site. In them, he asserts, inaccurately, that most antiretroviral drugs are derivatives of drugs used for cancer chemotherapy. He also continues his attack on the pharmaceutical industry, and in one letter claims, despite his unwillingness to speak to me, that "the possibility for the natural control of the AIDS epidemic triggered" a historic "public debate between Dr. Rath and *The New Yorker*," which, he says, "has generated global interest."

Rath no longer seems to spend much time in South Africa. In early 2005, he conducted a medically unsupported clinical study on patients in Khayelitsha who were using his multivitamins. That June, he held a press conference in Cape Town and claimed that the study demonstrated that "the course of AIDS can be reversed naturally."

Soon after Rath showed up in South Africa, Marta Darder told me, "everyone knew who he was and what he did. It was amazing. His pills look like A.R.V.s. They are the same color and shape. He would tell people to take fifteen or more a day." (Rath has denied these accusations.) Darder went on, "The government could have stopped him; it never did." Darder has spent many of her working hours struggling to convince Khayelitsha residents who revere the A.N.C. that their leaders have misled them. "The whole thing was disgusting," she said. She and her colleagues at Médecins Sans Frontières did what they could to counteract the government's false information. "It took months, and we were trying to help people," she said. "For us, it was an incredible distraction, an amazing waste of time. And it cost lives. But we had to defeat him, and at least here we did."

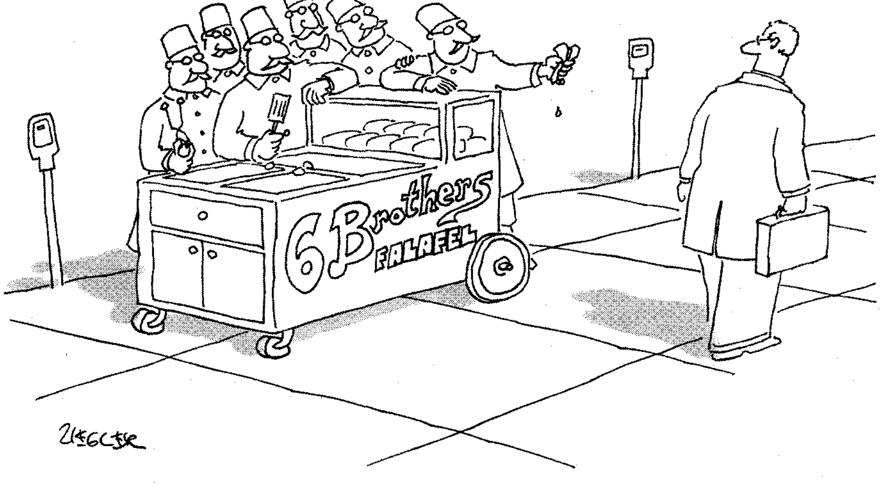
South Africa's Director-General of Health, Thami Mseleku, sees the whole episode as one in which a good man was driven from providing the type of health care that Africans really need. "What, exactly, was Rath's crime?" Mseleku asked when I visited him in his office, adjacent to Parliament. A week earlier, there had been hearings there on the state of AIDS treatment in South Africa. A number of prominent researchers testified, and so did Zeblon Gwala and Herbert Vilakazi. When Vilakazi launched into his standard speech about how the great promise of traditional medicine had been hindered by "scientists and other economically interested parties," many legislators nodded enthusiastically.

"This chap Gwala has a right to be heard in Parliament just as much as any doctor," Mseleku told me. "And it is not promoting democracy to believe otherwise." Mseleku is a huge, pear-shaped man with short curly hair. He was wearing a yellow checked shirt and a blue suit, and several times during our conversation he leaped nimbly from his desk to stroll about the office: "Every citizen is equal before the law, whether he is a scientist or the President or a truck driver. You know Gwala is not going to stop making ubhejane and people are not going to stop using it. So we would have to put them in prison to stop them, and how can you put people in prison for doing what they have a right to do?" Once again, he rose from his seat. "I am African, and I will never condemn him," he said. I asked whether merit might help decide whether a medical treatment was valuable, and suggested that training—as a doctor, for instance, rather than as a truck driver—would serve as a better guide to who should practice medicine.

"That is because you come from the West, with one perspective," he replied. "And you think it's the only perspective one can have. But in South Africa we are more open than that."

Quarraisha Abdool Karim, a handsome woman with gray threading through her black hair, is a professor of epidemiology at the Nelson R. Mandela School of Medicine, in Durban. She is also on the faculty at Columbia University, and is an adviser to the World Health Organization, UNAIDS, and many similar groups. When Nelson Mandela became President, he placed Abdool Karim at the head of South Africa's AIDS program, and she spent nearly two years in Pretoria. By the time Mbeki was elected, however, she had returned to academic life. She and her husband, also an epidemiologist at the university, run a clinic and research facility in a village west of Durban.

Abdool Karim's progressive policies came into question soon after Mbeki



assumed office. Tshabalala-Msimang took a delegation to Uganda and looked at a study, called H.I.V.NET, which found that just a few doses of Nevirapine, an antiretroviral given to the mother at the beginning of labor, and then to the infant within the first three days of life, dramatically reduced the risk of passing on the virus. The regimen is cheap and easy to use, and is now in place throughout the developing world. In just a few years, it has saved the lives of hundreds of thousands of infants.

But not in South Africa. "When Tshabalala-Msimang came back, that was when we started to hear the Duesberg-type pronouncements," Abdool Karim recalled. "It was the beginning of our downward spiral"—which ended in disaster at the XIII International AIDS Conference, held in Durban in 2000. "That was our lowest point," she said. In response to the many denialist statements issued by Mbeki and others, more than five thousand researchers who had gathered for the conference prepared one of the saddest documents in modern scientific history, the Durban Declaration, which stated that the evidence that H.I.V. causes AIDS is "clear-cut, exhaustive and unambiguous," and meets the "highest standards of science." Tshabalala-Msimang called it an élitist document, and Mbeki's spokesman said that it would quickly find its way to "the dustbins of the office." "It was so very, very depressing," Abdool Karim said. "Here was the world in Durban for this amazing event. But it had come to a desert.

"Mbeki couches his opposition to H.I.V. in ways that some would say are racist," she continued. "I would prefer to say that he wants to be seen as an Africanist—and that can mean many things. But part of it is to seek indigenous solutions to what appear to be indigenous problems. That is fine, but our health system is built on the foundations of Western medicine. We have the same immunization program for children that you have. Ours may even have better coverage. We manage hypertension, cardiac problems, and cancers in the same way that you do. We read *The New England Journal of Medicine*. We have t.b. We have malaria. We don't hear him saying, Where are the indigenous solutions for these illnesses?"

Last September, while I was in Cape Town, eighty-one of the world's most accomplished scientists sent a letter to Mbeki, demanding that Tshabalala-Msimang be fired. Mbeki has ignored such demands before.

"We should be acting on what we know," Abdool Karim told me. "And what we know is very grave." Not only has the death rate risen sharply but the age of those who are dying keeps falling. For the first time, deaths among people in their thirties or forties have exceeded those of people in their sixties or seventies. In her studies, Abdool Karim found that thirty per cent of women under the age of twenty are infected. "For those between ages twenty and twenty-five," she pointed out, "the rate is fifty-four per cent. Then it keeps rising: sixty-six per cent of the women between twenty-five and thirty years old are infected." She took her glasses off and wiped her eyes. "When you look past thirty, they are all dead."

That month, Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge, the deputy health minister, came to see me in Cape Town. She and her boss, Tshabalala-Msimang, could not disagree more on how to respond to the epidemic. A former deputy defense minister, Nozizwe, as she is called by everyone, is a large, warm woman, who immediately placed a beaded AIDS ribbon on my lapel. "You are from New York and today is 9/11," she said. "So you are our brother."

We went to a lounge in my hotel, and as soon as we sat down she dumped a giant document in my lap, entitled "Operational Plan for Comprehensive H.I.V. and AIDS Care, Management and Treatment for South Africa." "This is the official policy of our nation," she said. "And it is a very good policy. Before we say anything else, it is important to recognize that the policy of this country is not at fault." The plan, first published at the end of 2003, was not adopted until more than a year later. By then, a fifth of South African women were testing positive for H.I.V.

When we met, Nozizwe had been prohibited from speaking about AIDS for more than a year. "I won't ever forget the day," she said. "It was on Nelson Mandela's birthday, July 18th. They told me that I was not to talk about AIDS. And that I was not to disagree with my minister." She said that she tried to comply, but that in the end she had a greater responsibility: "It is important that I say the truth, because that is what sustains me. This is not *my* truth. But it is *the* truth. The values that taught us it is possible to fight an enemy like apartheid, which appeared impossible to defeat. It is *that* truth.

"You hear people talking all the time about traditional science as opposed to Western science," she went on. "This debate does not need to happen in a way that stops people from taking medicine that will save their lives. But it is killing large numbers of our citizens." That week, the country's statistical agency had announced that between nine hundred and a thousand people were dying every day from AIDS. "This is the reality we live with," she said. "I have lost relatives to AIDS. We all have. So let us not, as officials, say to people that they may go and use untested traditional medicine to treat their disease. Because it is killing them. It is killing all of us."

The recent decision to permit Nozizwe to speak out about AIDS was met, like the government's previous turnabouts, with wariness. Shortly before Tshabalala-Msimang, who had been ill for months, returned to work, she unleashed an attack, clearly aimed at her deputy, through the A.N.C. Web site, condemning those who were using her illness "as an opportunity to turn others into champions of a campaign to rid our government of the so-called H.I.V. and AIDS denial at the highest level." Two weeks ago, she was hospitalized again, and it is not clear what will happen next. For now, Mbeki has appointed the country's transport minister to act in her place. Some believe that Tshabalala-Msimang's illness may provide the President with a politically acceptable way to step away from his most extreme views, and that state support for AIDS denialism is waning. On February 9th, Mbeki, in his annual State of the Nation speech, declared that the government "commits itself to intensify the campaign against H.I.V. and AIDS." Nozizwe was not yet ready to declare victory. But she is more optimistic than she was last fall. "I never lose hope," she told me recently. "I went to jail during apartheid. I fought injustice and I know how to fight. We are a country in pain. I think that has to be said. A country in great pain and mourning. But I still believe the truth will win." ♦

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ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

SWANS' WAY

Why Matthew Bourne's dances are different.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

If you're trying to tell someone who Matthew Bourne is, all you have to say is "He's the English choreographer who made the 'Swan Lake' with the male swans," and the person says, "Oh, yes, the gay 'Swan Lake.'" In the traditional "Swan Lake," the Prince falls in love with a female swan. In Bourne's version, the beloved is a male swan. This was a big sensation, and it supplied every journalist covering the show with a ready-made lead. But what was important about the gender switch was that it made this old love story romantic again, by making it seem dangerous.

To many people, of course, homosexuality is no longer a social danger, but Bourne restored it to that status. In the canonic "Swan Lake," the lead Swan and her cohort are maidens who have been turned into swans by an evil sorcerer. In Bourne's ballet, the swans are swans—they haven't been changed into anything—and, like real swans, they are ferocious. They swoop, they dive; the lead Swan fixes the Prince with a cold, glassy stare. In other words, this is a romance not just between a male and a male but between a human being and an animal—a situation that, needless to say, would have no place in the modern, normalizing homophile plot. Nor is this "Swan Lake," though updated (London, swinging sixties), really part of the main line of postmodern resettings of opera and ballet classics. It doesn't have that history-bashing note. It's "edgy"; it takes on not just homosexuality but also the domestic problems of Britain's Royal Family (Diana, Fergie), which were very much in the press in 1995, when the show opened. Fundamentally, however, Bourne's "Swan Lake" is sincere, in the nineteenth-century sense, and about a nineteenth-century subject: the idea that we all have souls that are bigger than the world, and that romantic passion reveals this to us, fatally. The love that kills still exists, and it still kills.

That is the symbol, but the homosexual text was quite overt. You would think, then, that the show would have appealed to a limited audience. In fact, its first season, at Sadler's Wells, in London, sold out. Then it moved to a commercial theatre in the West End, where it had a hundred and twenty more performances. In 1998, it opened on Broadway, where it ran for four months. It has been playing, off and on, around the world, ever since. Last December, it returned to London, and the ticket line wound around the block every day. Well before the opening, the box office had taken in more than a million pounds.

Other hits followed. Bourne is now a busy man. When I first met with him, last November, he was about to open three shows in the space of three days. "Swan Lake" was being remounted in Paris; "Mary Poppins," which he co-directed, was being installed on Broadway; and his newest show, "Edward Scissorhands," which opened in London last year, was having its American première, in San Francisco. "Edward" will move into the Brooklyn Academy of Music next week.

Bourne looks like the man on the street: medium height, solid build, round, open face, short brown hair, boring brown sweaters. He is forty-seven, though he looks ten years younger. He is soft-spoken, modest, and disarmingly candid. He came, he says, from "a very, very ordinary East End working-class family." Jim Bourne worked for the water board; his wife, June, was a secretary; and they had two sons, Dan and Matthew, in that order. Dan is now married, with two daughters; he has been working in investment banks since he was sixteen. Matthew, on the other hand, was clearly not destined for banking. His parents were musical-comedy fans, and, from the time he was four or five, they sat him down in front of the television set to watch movie musicals with them. Within a few years, he was staging musicals of his own, at his school. "I did a fifteen-minute version of 'Lady and the Tramp,'" he recalls, "and a ten-minute version of 'Hello, Dolly!' I just stole whatever I could remember."

When he was a child, he says, he was a terrible showoff. "I was loud and always answering all the teacher's questions. 'Miss, miss,' you know, with my hand in the air. I think I was quite annoying. I remember the teacher throwing the chalk at me once." The other children teased him, but he paid no attention. "I felt like I had something to offer, and why would they make fun of me?" That changed with adolescence: "I became very introverted." He came to hate school, and now the teasing did get to him: "I realized that I wasn't like everyone else, and I started to keep things about myself hidden." He had one friend, a boy named Simon Carter (who is still his best friend), and together they became autograph hounds. Two or three times a week, they would take the bus to the West End and stand by the stage doors. For working-class boys who grow up to be theatre artists, this is a common story.

When Bourne finished school, he had no thought of university. All he wanted was to be where someone was putting on a show. He eventually took a job at London's National Theatre, where he worked in the bookstore and ushered. One of the other ushers told him about the Laban Centre, one of London's premier modern-dance academies, and he decided to try out. He had little hope of getting in. He was twenty-two years old and had never taken a dance lesson. But the Laban Centre, like all dance schools, was desperate for men, and the auditioners were apparently impressed by how much dance he had seen. (By now, he was mad for ballet as well as for musical comedy.) They took him, and they tried to retool him. This was in 1982, when in England modern dance was a young field, and puritanically "contemporary." Dances, as the Laban faculty saw it, should have no stories, and they didn't really need music, either. A dance should be a "movement study," an exploration of structure. Bourne respected this aesthetic: "I wanted to emulate that. I did try and do that." But it didn't work, because it wasn't what he really wanted to do. He wanted to tell stories.

At the Laban Centre, the undergraduate dance-history course was taught by a young reviewer, Alastair Macaulay. (Next month, he will become the *Times*' lead dance critic.) Eight years ago, Macaulay published a book of interviews, "Matthew Bourne and His Adventures in Motion Pictures." This is an extraordinary document, the closest investigation on record of a choreographer's creative process. (A second, updated edition will come out this year.) One of the things the book makes clear is how much Bourne was affected by Macaulay's course. He loved discovering the formulas that choreographers of the past had used to represent their subjects, and he loved finding out that those subjects—male beauty, female beauty, the operations of hope and fate—were the same ones that he cared about. Dance history frees you, he says. What it freed him from was modernism.

When he graduated from the Laban Centre, in 1986, Bourne, with some friends, put together a repertory company specializing in what he has called "arty farce"—that is, camp. One of the troupe's offerings, by Jacob Marley, a fellow Laban alumnus, was entitled "Does Your Crimplene Go All Crusty When You Rub?" (Crimplene is a polyester fabric. The dance was set to a medley of Mantovani, ABBA, and Scottish folk tunes.) Another piece, "Spitfire," by Bourne, showed four men in their underpants taking poses from Jules Perrot's famous 1845 ballerina showcase "Pas de Quatre." Even the name of the company was camp. The group was on a China Airways plane, and one of the dancers read the words printed on the plastic bag containing the earphones. "Adventures in Motion Pictures!" she said delightedly. "That's what we should call ourselves."

Bourne with Richard Winsor as Edward Scissorhands. Photograph by Cass Bird.

And they did. "We became known as the funny company," Bourne says. "People loved us for that, and it was nice, being loved."

In 1992, Bourne made the first of his so-called updated classics, "Nutcracker!," with the old tale set not in a cozy German home but in a Dickensian orphanage. In 1994 came "Highland Fling," a rogue version of August Bournonville's 1836 "La Sylphide." Bournonville's ballet was set in Walter Scott's Highlands, with fairies flying over the moors, and young men dreaming of them. Bourne relocated the ballet to modern Glasgow, which comes off not unlike the Edinburgh of "Trainspotting." The show opens with the hero, James, getting high in a public toilet; his dream of a fairy love comes courtesy of Ecstasy. He and his mates belch and vomit and pee. One does a dance with a pair of ladies' underpants over his head. This sounds rough, and it was, but in a rollicking way. A.M.P. was still the funny company.

Then, Bourne recalls, he had a transforming experience. He likes to sit in the middle of the audience to see his ballets, and in 1994 he did so at a performance of "Highland Fling." That show ends badly for James, and so be it, you might say: he was a lout. "But as I sat there, at the end," Bourne remembers, "the people around me were totally silent, leaning forward in their seats. You could hear a pin drop. I realized that that was a big part of why people came to the theatre—to have this gut-wrenching emotion. And I saw that I could give it to them. I could move people, and I wanted to." From then on, for a subject to engage him, it had to have "a darker side, a heart to it, something that meant something to me." The following year, he made "Swan Lake."

In his move away from camp, Bourne was following a well-worn path. Camp was an escape route from modernism, a return to the charm and glamour that had been banned by that austere movement. The purveyors of camp had been raised on modernism, and so they treated their pretty things with irony as well as with love, but, over time, in the work of many artists—Pedro Almodóvar is a good example—love won out. The left turn (irony) became a U-turn (sincerity). Macaulay, in one of his interviews with Bourne, says of Julie Andrews and "The Sound of Music" that he thinks "half the point of growing up is to outgrow her films." "Oh, I can't take that kind of talk," Bourne replies. "That film's so much a part of me." This statement is echt camp, but it is also about three-quarters heartfelt, and it is on that ratio that the post-camp artists, including Bourne, have built their art.

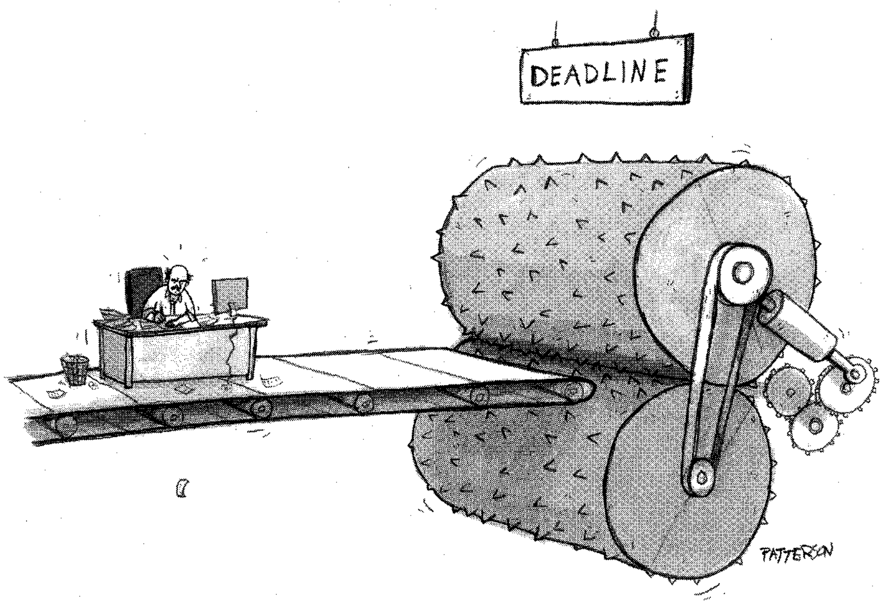
The success of Bourne's "Swan Lake" led to a rapid expansion of Adventures in Motion Pictures. In 1989, the British Arts Council, which at that time was helping to fund Bourne's work, had put him together with a young arts administrator, Katharine Doré, and she took over as A.M.P.'s manager. Doré supervised the conversion of the company from the merry band that it was in the beginning to the larger, better-run troupe, directed by Bourne and devoted to his work only, that it became in the early nineties—a troupe that could produce "Swan Lake." But, once A.M.P.'s reputation became bigger, so did Doré's plans for it. For years, the company had been based in a small office at Sadler's Wells; she moved it to plush new quarters in the West End. Suddenly, Bourne told Macaulay, "we had all these employees, and people coming in to tell us how we should sell ourselves." Arguably, such advice was needed at that point; the post-"Swan Lake" offers were rolling in. Would Bourne make a piece for this company; and that one? Hollywood studios approached him: would he like to direct a movie?

Some of these offers were hard to turn down, but they conflicted with the working method that Bourne was developing at the time, a collaborative method. "I'm a reactor," he says. "I can't bear the nothingness of 'How do you get going?' I need the company to give me something." So he developed a three-stage system. First, he works by himself, listening to the music and plotting out the show. Then he holds what he calls "workshops," with a small group of dancers, often veterans. The group has varied from piece to piece, but for the last decade or so it has included Etta Murfitt, the original Clara of "Nutcracker!," and Scott Ambler, the first Prince of "Swan Lake." Bourne gives the workshop participants themes, and they improvise. "For 'Swan Lake,' we went to St. James's Park and watched swans," he recalls. "Then we went back to the studio and spent hours trying to capture how they really moved, both in and out of the water. Believe me, on land they're not so graceful." As the dancers improvise, Bourne directs them, nudging them this way and that. He videotapes the results, and this becomes his movement material.

From there he proceeds to rehearsals with the whole company. A major task at this point is to create the characters—which, in large measure, the dancers do. Bourne provides them with rough outlines of who they are, plus suggestions for books to read and movies to watch. The dancers then go off, fashion a personality for their character, and come back and present it to the whole company. Such characters are not just sketches. Here is Bourne's summary, for Macaulay, of the Stepmother in his 1997 "Cinderella," the last, so far, of his updated classics. (It is set during the Blitz.) The character was created by the veteran ballerina Lynn Seymour, who first took that role: "She's called Sybil, in her late forties. She's an ex-hooker. Four previous husbands. The first was a customer. The second was a tycoon, by whom she had the two sons. She was married to a politician, by whom she had the girls; then to a spiv"—a small-time hood—"with whom she had the younger brother. She is dangerous, stealthy, plotting, selfish, greedy, unpredictable, ritualistic, jealous of daughters." The other characters, however minor, got equally extensive résumés.

In addition to suggesting to the dancers their characters, Bourne shows them the movement ideas that emerged from the workshops and asks them for further steps, based on their new personalities. He takes what he likes, adapting it, and he synchronizes the dancers' various routines. (All the company's acting is dance. No matter how many people are onstage, doing different things, they are all moving to the same musical counts.) Bourne also creates the ensemble dances, cleans everything up, and gives the show that shape, that arc of energy, which we call theatre.

The members of Bourne's company sometimes dilate enthusiastically to the press on the subject of their contributions to his shows. Once, in a post-performance talk, Etta Murfitt described how this part of a dance was invented by this dancer, and that one by that dancer. An audience member then asked her what Bourne did. "Oh," she replied, "he's a genius. He takes the best bits." On occasion, Bourne will show a flash of pride, and defend his role as creator of his productions. But mostly he just sits back and smiles, and says how grateful he is to the company for what they have given him. Tellingly, he will often add how important the performers' sense of their joint authorship is to the success of the show, how each dancer does his role more spiritedly, more artistically, because he feels it is his creation. There is method to his modesty.



Such a system, requiring a tight-knit company, with Bourne there, as its head, for extended periods of time, did not conform with Katharine Doré's hopes for Adventures in Motion Pictures. According to Bourne, she increasingly saw A.M.P. as a producing organization: "The emphasis was going toward the company being what came out of the *office*, rather than the studio. The performers became less important, and so did I. It was like 'We can do this show at the same time as that one, and we can just cast it, and that can go here, and that can go there.'"

Bourne felt that he had to return to a "family" way of working—smaller casts, cheaper productions, long, percolating rehearsal periods—and, as if to symbolize this back-to-basics move, he created his first piece of naturalism, "The Car Man," in 2000. This piece is sometimes spoken of as one of his updated classics. Both the score and the story rely partly on Bizet's "Carmen." But Bourne's main inspiration for "The Car Man" was the 1946 movie "The Postman Always Rings Twice." Without a hint of "framing," he set out to reproduce that classic film-noir tale of adultery, murder, and retribution. Indeed, his version is far more forthright than the movie. In the women's dances, their breasts strain against their buttons. As the show progresses, people engage in sex acts of many varieties, on many surfaces (floor, table, car hood). But it's not just the sex that's blunt. The adulterous couple's murder of her husband is appalling. They bludgeon him with a wrench; he takes forever to die. A DVD of "The Car Man" is commercially available, from Image Entertainment. In it, the dancers go at their roles like hungry dogs. "They were tired of being princes and princesses," Bourne says.

Though "The Car Man" was an assertion of old company values, it did not solve the problems between Bourne and Doré, and he made up his mind that the company had to split from her. Doré's remarks to the press about this have been diplomatic. ("I just felt our relationship had run its course," she told the *Independent*. "I wanted more variety, and Matthew wanted to go on to pastures new.") Lawyers were involved, however, and Bourne says that the proceedings were not pleasant. He feared the company would fold. It did go into bankruptcy, but then it was reincorporated and renamed: New Adventures. Now, apart from Bourne, the roster lists only five people: a co-director, Robert Noble, who arranges the company's tours, and four associate directors—Etta Murfitt, Scott Ambler, Lez Brotherston, Bourne's longtime set and costume designer, and Terry Davies, who has written the music for several of his shows. New Adventures, Bourne says happily, has only one employee, his part-time assistant, Suzanne: "She goes into the office a couple of times a week to check the mail." The office, once again, is at Sadler's Wells, in two rooms.

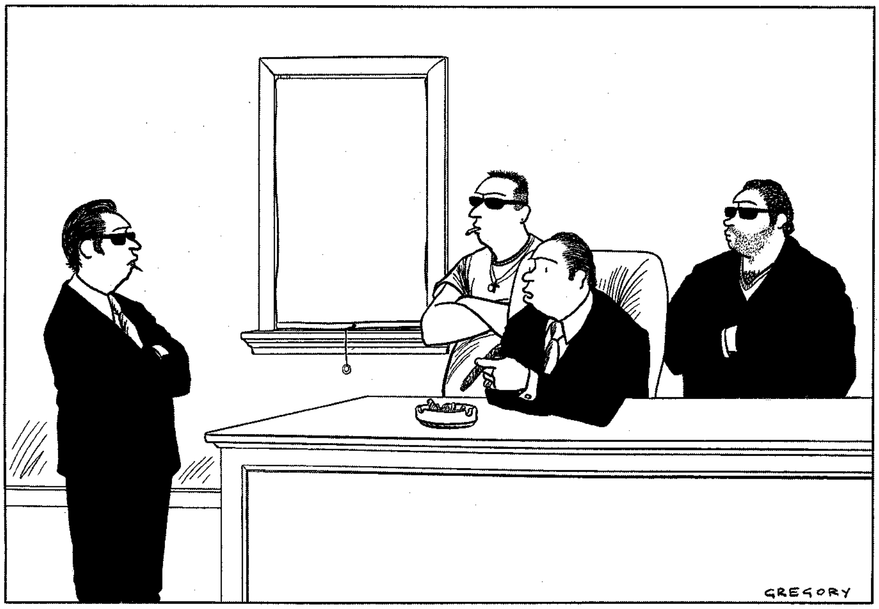
Still, Bourne has never really been able to get back to his old way of working. Today, New Adventures usually has two shows running at the same time, and that's not counting the musicals—"Oliver!," "My Fair Lady," "South Pacific"—that Bourne has worked on as a freelance choreographer, without his company. To manage this schedule, he assigns a tour director to each production and flies back and forth between the cities they're playing in. Sometimes, he betrays nostalgia for the intimate company of yesteryear (he now has seventy dancers) and for the one-piece-at-a-time process. Such thoughts often occur to artists in his position—the mid-career, still-hot position.

In January, I went to Charlotte, North Carolina, to see "Edward Scissorhands," and the next morning I watched Bourne in a "notes" session, giving corrections to his cast. He sat in a stiff plastic chair, with his back to the studio's mirror, and thirty dancers sat on the floor opposite him, stretching their legs and kneading their arches, but listening. He spoke gently—"It's really hard, I know"—but his corrections were pointed. To the two men playing the title role he talked about a scene in which Edward frightens everyone else onstage and they all run away from him. "Don't look forward," he said. "Look to the sides, where the people have gone. You're suddenly alone." Then, to the company, about their exit in that scene: "Don't run like a dancer, bouncy. *Run!*" To a dancer playing a teen-age boy, about a rollerblading scene: "Don't just skate. Skate as though you think you look cool." Never, in his mind, is a movement just a movement. It is always a story, about character and feeling.

Bourne is the most audience-conscious artist I have ever spoken to, or the one most willing to admit to that concern. In his view, he owes it to his audience to make his stories completely understandable—"logical," as he puts it. The swans in "Swan Lake," the sylphs in "Highland Fling," Candyland in "Nutcracker!": these things don't really exist, he has said. They are in the protagonist's mind—a dream, a hallucination. I have wondered sometimes whether he really believes this, or if he is just trying to make it easier for people to cope with his material—for example, homosexuality in "Swan Lake." He told me, "With a subject matter such as that, I have a way of approaching it so as to make it—I hate to say 'acceptable,' it's a terrible thing to say—but so that people don't run screaming from the theatre. I let them find their own way with it, take it as far as they want to in their heads."

Part of his goal there was political—to make homosexuality acceptable, as he said—and he achieved it. The DVD of his "Swan Lake" is now part of the syllabus for the college-entrance exams in dance in Britain. But Bourne's insistence on logic probably has to do, mainly, with the nature of his public. Since "Swan Lake," he has had not just a dance audience but a less sophisticated general audience. In Charlotte, Bourne said to me, "This audience has never seen anything like this before. I could tell, at the beginning, that a lot of people were shocked that no one on the stage spoke. 'You mean they're not going to say anything?': I could hear this around me. Then, by the end of Act I, they're watching a sort of topiary ballet"—the show's "dream ballet," performed by garden hedges—"and they're rather happy about it, you know, that they're watching a bit of abstract dance, maybe the first they've ever seen." But to get them to that point, he claims, you have to win them over, by giving them characters and actions they can believe in.

He gives them other things, too—for example, an intermission. He would never have a show without an intermission, he says: "At the interval, they'll talk to each other and say, 'What do you think?' and 'I think I quite like it.' Then they go back, and in the second half they're always more demonstrative, because they've talked to their friends and decided that it's O.K. to enjoy it." Another matter he pays attention to is curtain calls: "If someone in my company just stands there during the curtain call, waiting for it to be over, I run to the dressing room straightaway afterward. They're taught to give warmth at the curtain call. That way, people will want to come back. I pride myself on my company's curtain calls, I really do. I think you won't see a nicer curtain call than from my lot."



"Interesting business proposal. We'll have to run it by illegal."

But in a show that Bourne made five years ago he broke all his rules of audience-friendliness. In 2002, Trevor Nunn, the director of Britain's National Theatre, was planning a season of experimental works, to bring in young ticket buyers, and he approached Bourne. (They had worked together on "My Fair Lady" and "South Pacific.") Bourne had a little space in his schedule, and, after almost a decade of putting on productions that had to succeed brilliantly if they were not to fail, he thought it would be nice to make a show that was subsidized, and designated in advance as "experimental"—in other words, a show that could fail with no loss of pride, and no disappointed investors. "What if I did a play without words?" he said to Nunn. Fine, Nunn answered, and that became the name of the piece, "Play Without Words."

Like "The Car Man," "Play Without Words" was inspired by a movie, or several movies. The first model was Joseph Losey's 1963 "The Servant," scripted by Harold Pinter. From there, Bourne moved on to Tony Richardson's adaptation of John Osborne's "Look Back in Anger" and to a number of other films. (In speaking to Macaulay of the sources of "Play Without Words," Bourne named twenty-five films off the top of his head, without looking at notes. He knows more films than Quentin Tarantino does.) These films, most of them from the English nineteen-fifties and sixties, the period of the so-called Angry Young Men, took a cold, hard view of the English class system, and the coldness was often experimentally rendered. As Bourne says, Pinter didn't always make it clear what was going on: "He suggested things."

So did Bourne in "Play Without Words." The show's most striking act of anti-realism was its multiplied cast. "Play Without Words" is the story of a young man on the rise, Anthony, who hires a butler, Prentice, to plump up his status and is then corrupted and destroyed by the butler. What you see on the stage, however, is not one Anthony and one Prentice but, at various points, two or three of them—also three representatives of Anthony's fiancée, Glenda, and of the housemaid, Sheila—operating side by side. When one Anthony is being dressed by one Prentice, another is being undressed by another Prentice. When one Anthony is having sex with Sheila on the kitchen counter, another Anthony/Sheila pair, discomfortingly, are watching them. Bourne has defended this split-screen business as a species of realism. As he said to the *Times*, "You may have one couple downstage doing what's really happening, and, behind them, another couple doing what they're thinking. And then you have another couple doing what they did a half hour later." In conventional theatre, however, those three actions do not unfold simultaneously. By making them do so, Bourne shot the show past realism. "In rehearsals," he remembers, "the performers were asking me, 'Well, what actually happens here?' And I was saying, 'Maybe let's just leave that open. Maybe we don't know.'"

Bourne still seems a little surprised by what he did in "Play Without Words," and embarrassed by any talk of his dealing in abstraction. Luckily for him, he had only five weeks to make the piece, not enough time to panic. "We were still working on it as people were waiting outside to come in for the first preview. I said to the dancers, 'Do you mind going on and doing it?' and they said, 'O.K., we'll try to get through it.' And it was amazing—the audience laughed, they got things, they understood it." "Play Without Words" was Bourne's biggest critical success since "Swan Lake." Originally scheduled for two weeks, at the National, it went on to tour the United Kingdom. Later, it did eight weeks in Los Angeles and three weeks in New York.

That was a happy surprise, which seemed to say to Bourne that he need not stick to the rules of popular theatre. In fact, the two shows he has presented since then do obey such rules, in his own way. Bourne's work almost always contains a substantial amount of pain and ugliness. This goes way beyond the naughty iconoclasm of his updated classics. In "Cinderella," the Fairy Godmother figure, a man, saves Cinderella, but he is also an angel of death. In "Nutcracker!," the Nutcracker abandons Clara, the heroine, for another woman—indeed, marries the other woman. This scene is anguishing to watch, and finding out later that it was all a bad dream does not entirely salve the pain. Life is nasty; Bourne shows it.

And, elsewhere, he shows how funny nastiness can be. Like so many of his countrymen, he is a natural satirist. His average show has a veritable horde of secondary characters, all, typically, venal and self-seeking: the seventy deadly sins. But partly because of the wealth of bright detail in these portraits—the fruit of the character-creating rehearsals and the notes sessions—they are also lovable. For all the ugliness, most of Bourne's shows are optimistic, or at least morally comforting. His psychology is old-fashioned: he believes in repression. ("That's why so many of my pieces are set in the fifties and early sixties.") But, *pace* Freud, repression can be a consoling theory. It means, first of all, that human behavior is understandable. Furthermore, it offers the hope that if you face what's inside you, things may come right. Or, if they go wrong, at least the sacrifice was on the altar of truth. In Bourne's "Swan Lake," the Prince and the Swan die, but they go to Heaven.

All of this is made more piercing by the directness of Bourne's dramaturgy. His shows move fast, and stick to the point: "I can't bear that kind of theatre which is, Bring on a big set, do the scene, curtain comes down, wait, curtain goes up. Or its dance equivalent, with the stops and starts, the bits where the music cuts out and then you've got that sort of silent moment. It drives me crazy." In keeping his shows moving, he has been immeasurably helped by Lez Brotherston's sets. "They're like playgrounds in which to create places," he says. They never trap you in a room. Instead, they just show you a crucial fixture: a staircase, a fireplace, a bed. "Suddenly, just by a shift of light, the fireplace becomes a bar in a pub. A couple of people move position, and you're there, in the next action, with no later-that-day." He thinks that both he and Brotherston got their sense of pacing from the movies.

"Mary Poppins" displays Bourne's virtues about as much as a production that he co-directed and co-choreographed could. The other side of those "co"s—Richard Eyre as director, Stephen Mear as choreographer—may have supplied this musical's tendency toward hard sell. (Also, Bourne's artistic ambition may flag when he's not in a position of complete authority.) The show has Bourne's moral seriousness; we get Mary Poppins and the chimney sweeps, up on the roof, telling the audience how much their comfortable lives depend on people they pay no attention to. But that summary betrays how much more pat "Mary Poppins" is than the usual Bourne piece.

"Edward Scissorhands" is a different matter, as one might expect from an actual Bourne-company project, and one that he initiated. Bourne saw Tim Burton's movie "Edward Scissorhands" when it came out, in 1990, and he adored it. He approached Burton about the possibility of a stage adaptation, and Burton gave him carte blanche. The story is a Frankenstein adaptation. Edward is a young man created by an inventor who gave him a great clutch of scissors in place of each of his hands. The two live together happily in their scary castle on the hill until the inventor dies. Edward then goes down into the town below and is taken in by a family, the Boggses. Eventually, he falls in love with the Boggses' teen-age daughter, Kim—which, needless to say, creates difficulties in the household. He also learns to use his scissor-hands to create art—topiary, ice sculpture—and now and then, like a peacock, he splays his scissors to show his pride in his new accomplishments. This is the show's lesson, that a sense of difference can make you an artist, but the handling of it is light: tender, witty, at times sentimental. It's a fairy tale, and Edward remains a freak, though a cute one.

The show really belongs to the townspeople, as they progress from fascination with Edward to fear of him, and finally drive him away. The town is called Hope Springs, and it is a caricature of American suburban culture: all fake cheer and barbecues and adultery. Apart from the Boggses, there are five families, each of whose members represents a different little absurdity. Gerald Monroe, the boy next door, is a flaming queen—he primps, he twirls a baton—and no one seems to notice this, which makes it very funny. Then there is Marilynn-Ann Evercreech, the daughter of the Evangelical family, a girl who seems ripe for membership in a satanic cult. At the barbecue, she wears a black swim cap that looks like a caul. You can't take your eyes off it.

Reviewers often say that Bourne is not, primarily, a choreographer but a movement-theatre man. That is true; pure dance is his weak suit. In "Edward," the unforgettable numbers are the group dances for the townspeople, where what is paramount is not structure but character, with each person doing the dance in his own idiosyncratic way. It's like a Bosch painting, an orchestration of detail. "Oh, look at that," you say: Gerald Monroe going into a Carmen Miranda routine, or Marilynn-Ann Evercreech doing something frightful. By contrast, the culminating pas de deux for Edward and Kim seems short on material. Still, it is compelling: a portrait of two people trying to dance together, not easily, since Edward has no hands. The awkwardness comes off as a symbol of love's difficulty, and when you add to that the naturalistic look of Bourne's lead women—their flat shoes, their open thighs, the fact that they don't mind if you see their underpants—the effect is touching. It may not be the exalted story of love's progress that you see in a classical-ballet pas de deux, but it is a human story: "I'm just a person, a thing of flesh and underpants. Love me anyway."

Right now, Bourne is probably the world's most successful choreographer, at least of live shows. Accordingly, he has a beautiful seventeenth-century house, a former sexton's cottage, in north London. "I saw it in an estate agent's window," he says. "I thought, I have to have this. There are old engravings of it from when the area was just fields, with sheep. And there it still is." Called Church Cottage, it was once the home of Charles Wesley, and reportedly it was there that Wesley wrote "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing." Bourne lives in Church Cottage with his partner, Arthur Pita—formerly a dancer in his company, now an independent choreographer—and their two Chihuahuas, Mr. Eddie and Grace. He also has a house in Brighton, where he goes to relax, though, from what he says, his friends and family relax there more often than he does. He is in England only about half the year.

Bourne has a highly marketable repertory—the company is booked through 2010—and that can buy you more than a Jacobean cottage. Bourne's recent shows have been conservative, but they were not conceived recently. "Mary Poppins" got going in 1994, "Edward" in 1998. A big musical takes a long time to produce. What Bourne has been thinking about lately, as he fulfilled those old commitments, is quite different.

He would like to do a homosexual version of "Romeo and Juliet," to the Prokofiev score. He has already named it—"Romeo, Romeo"—and he will start workshops on it this summer. Listening to him talk about this, one fears for him, not just because of the tendentiousness and sentimentality that such a subject could inspire but for simple dance reasons. As he himself points out, same-sex relationships, however natural they are in life, are not yet natural in dance: "It's more to do with dancing than with sexuality. A male dancer, whether he's gay or straight, fits into a relationship with a female partner very happily. It's something you're taught, and it fits, it feels right, the lifting and all that stuff. Getting away from that, making a convincing love duet, a romantic, sexual duet, for two men that is comfortable to do and comfortable to watch—I don't know if you can. I've never seen it done." He wants to try, though. If it doesn't work, he'll scrap it.

He has another show in mind, too, based on King Vidor's 1928 silent movie "The Crowd" and set to extracts from Bernard Hermann's film scores: "It's to do with how the metropolis—the crowd and even just the space—affects one man. It's a one-person story, but with a cast of thousands, in a sense. Of course, it won't have a cast of thousands, though I may call it that." This sounds like the last show he started, "Play Without Words": experimental and sinister. In December, the avowedly audience-conscious Bourne told the *Guardian* that he'd like to do something "small and unpopular"—in other words, what he thought he was doing in "Play Without Words." I asked him about this connection, and he said yes, that he'd like, once again, to have that freedom: "The chance to fail, to try something where you don't know what will come up." I told him I'd like to see the results. "Well, you may never do," he answered, "because it might be a complete disaster and be on somewhere for a couple of weeks and never be seen again. But I need that now." And that is what a marketable repertory can buy you. ♦

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

INAPPROPRIATE

BY PAUL RUDNICK

A children's book that included the word "scrotum" was recently the subject of great controversy in school libraries nationwide. A Google search has discovered several more questionable titles and excerpts from other works intended for readers twelve and under.

"The Pretty Little Bunny"

Melissa, the pretty little bunny, woke up one morning in May and said, "I think I'll hop-hop-hop over to the carrot patch. I'm so pretty that all of the carrots will jump right out of the ground to see me."

"You are very pretty," said Melissa's Bunny Mommy. "But your sister is pretty, too, and she doesn't spend all of her time looking at herself in the mirror."

"But is she as pretty as me?" asked Melissa. "Just look at my vagina."

"The Clattery Caboose"

Carl the Caboose had worked for the railroad for a long time. He loved it when little children ran alongside the tracks and waved to him. But Carl was getting older. His bright-red paint was peeling, his wheels were getting squeaky, and don't even ask about his prostate.

"Where's Waldo's Hand?"

"The Lonely Little Moonbeam"

The lonely little moonbeam would sleep all day, and then wake up and shine all night long, to guide people on their way. But he was lonely, because people never looked up and smiled at him. They were too busy performing fellatio.

"Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret, and I Need It Bad"

"Cornelius Thimbletuck and the Wizard of Trewe"

Every night, Cornelius would pray that his parents would rescue him from the Smudgebury Orphanatorium, and every morning he'd awaken on his hard, wooden cot. And so before eating his meagre ration of watery gruel he would masturbate until his palm bled.

"Oh, the People You'll Do"

"The Lion Princess"

Tarandiria, the beautiful lion princess, was strolling through the tall grass one day with her mother, Queen Malafala. Tarandiria said, "Mother lioness, whenever I see that handsome leopard over there I get a strange, tingling feeling."

"Where do you get this feeling, my child?" asked the Queen.

Tarandiria told her, "In my hyena."

"Betsy Barstow, Colonial Girl"

One fine morning, as Betsy went to the village well in the Olde Massachusetts Baye colony, she ran into her best friend, feisty Katey Karmody.

"Oh, Katey," said Betsy, "I have such news! My father and my brothers are joining up with the militia to fight the British, so that we may all be free!"

"Oh, Betsy, that *is* news!" cried Katey. "My nipples are like muskets!"

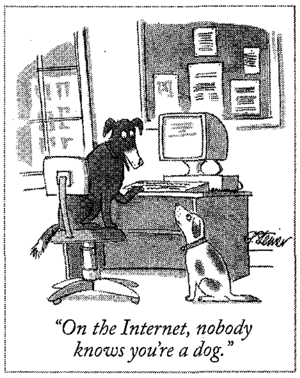
"The Big Floppy Penis"

"The Little Mermaid at Sea"

As Ariel cavorted through the waves and foam, she thought to herself, How I love the sea and all its friendly creatures. How I love capering and leaping from cove to lagoon. How I love to be at one with the grand undersea kingdom, but I think I have crabs.

"A Modern Child's Garden of Verses"

Smart Susie O'Malley just loved her computer,
She didn't need pencils or books or a tutor.
Chad had a laptop, a Mac, and a modem,
He Web-cammed smart Susie a shot of his scrodem. ♦



HUMOROUS HOUNDS

"On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog."

Peter Steiner, 1993

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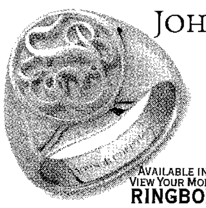

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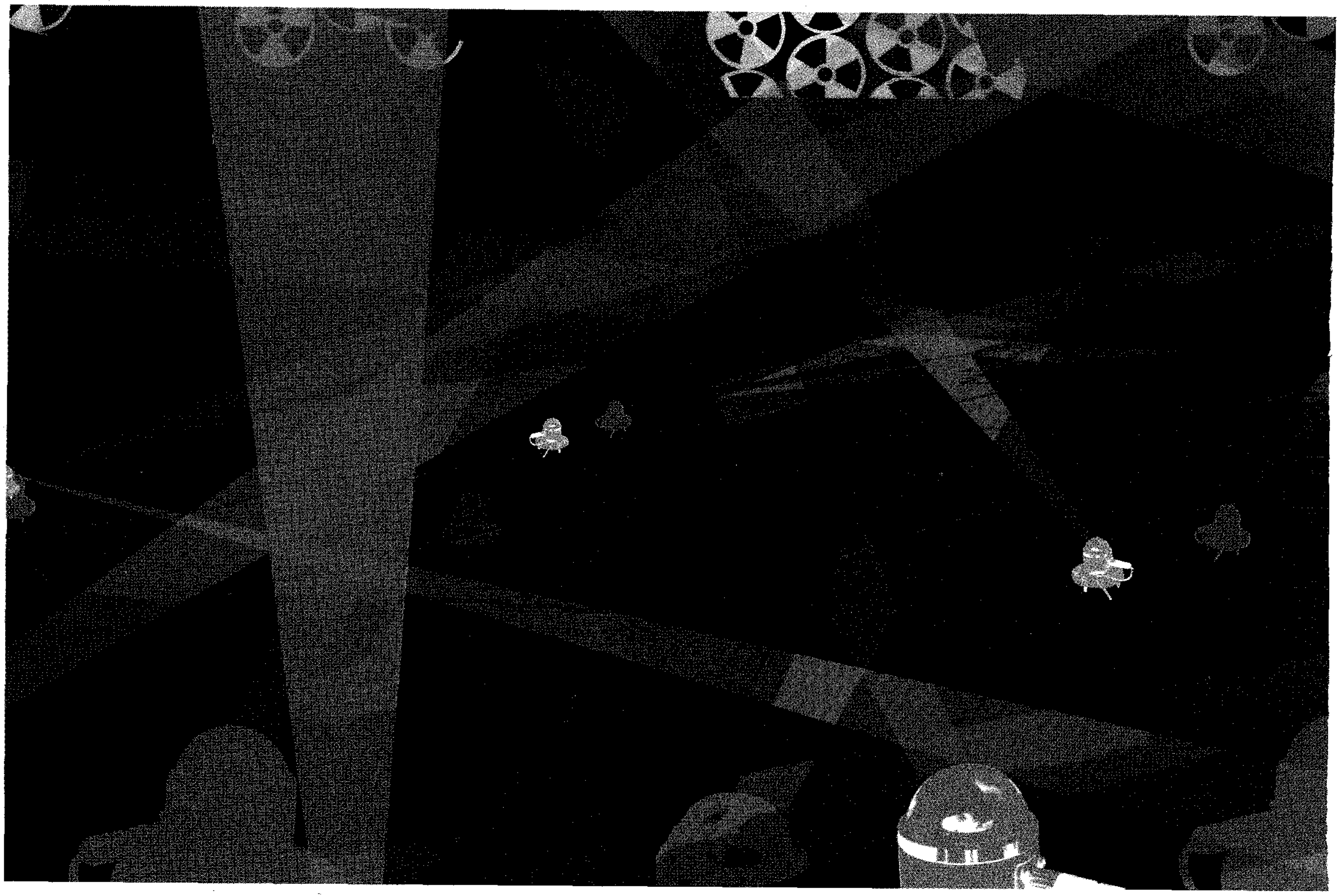


JOHN RITTER

A REPORTER AT LARGE

THE UNTHINKABLE

Can the United States be made safe from nuclear terrorism?

BY STEVE COLL

In October, 2005, a radiation sensor at the Port of Colombo, in Sri Lanka, signalled that the contents of an outbound shipping container included radioactive material. The port's surveillance system, installed with funds from the National Nuclear Security Administration, an agency within the Department of Energy, wasn't yet in place, so the container was loaded and sent to sea before it could be identified. After American and Sri Lankan inspectors hurriedly checked camera images at the port, they concluded that the suspect crate might be on any one of five ships—two of which were steaming toward New York.

Sri Lanka is a locus of guerrilla war and arms smuggling. It is not far from Pakistan, which possesses nuclear arms, is a haven for Al Qaeda, and has a poor record of nuclear security. The radiation-emitting container presented at least the theoretical danger of a "pariah ship," Vayl Oxford, the director of the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office, which is part of the Department of Homeland Security, said. It seemed plausible, if unlikely, that Al Qaeda or rogue Pakistani generals might load a bomb onto a cargo vessel. Within days, American satellites located the five suspect ships and intelligence analysts scrutinized their manifests; a team at the National Security Council took charge. One ship, it learned, was bound for Canada, and another for Hamburg, Germany. The White House decided to call in its atomic-bomb squad, known as NEST, the Nuclear Emergency Support Team—scientists who are trained to search for nuclear weapons. One team flew to Canada and a second to Europe, where it intercepted one of the ships at sea before it could reach Hamburg. They found nothing.

The United States Coast Guard stopped the two New York-bound ships in territorial waters, about ten miles offshore; from that distance, if there was a nuclear weapon on board a detonation would cause relatively little harm. Scientists boarded the vessels, shouldering diagnostic equipment, but these ships, too, turned out to be clean; as it happened, the offending vessel was on an Asian route, and its cargo was scrap

metal mixed with radioactive materials that had been dumped improperly. The entire episode, which was not disclosed to the public, lasted about two weeks.

This sometimes nerve-racking exercise resulted in no more than the disposal of some radioactive waste. It was also the first major defensive maneuver triggered by a shield that the United States is attempting to build as a defense against a clandestine nuclear attack. The idea, in essence, is to envelop the country in rings of radiation detectors and connect these sensors to military and police command centers, which would then respond to unexplained movements of nuclear material. The project, comparable in ambition to ballistic-missile defense, is the first of its kind in the atomic age. The plan has already attracted criticism from some scientists and defense strategists, primarily because, as with missile defense, the project promises to be expensive and would require leaps of ingenuity to overcome technical problems presented by the laws of physics.

Still, with little public discussion this "layered defense," as it is described by its proponents, is being deployed. The federal government has distributed more than fifteen hundred radiation detectors to overseas ports and border crossings, as well as to America's northern and southern borders, domestic seaports, Coast Guard ships, airports, railways, mail facilities, and even some highway truck stops. More detectors are being distributed each month. NEST and the Federal Bureau of Investigation maintain a permanent team to respond to events in Washington and along the Northeast Corridor; a second team trained to dismantle nuclear weapons is based in Albuquerque, and eight other teams able to diagnose radioactive materials operate on continuous alert elsewhere in the country. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, NEST teams have been deployed about twice a year because of specific threats reported by intelligence agencies, including at least two instances, apart from the Sri Lankan episode, where they boarded a ship approaching the United States. NEST units also discreetly screen vehicles, buildings, and people at designated events such as political conventions and the recent N.B.A. All-Star Game, in Las Vegas. In the United States alone, the sensors generate more than a thousand radiation alarms on an average day, all of which must be investigated.

The world, it turns out, is awash in uncontrolled radioactive materials. Most are harmless, but a few are dangerous, and many detectors are still too crude to distinguish among different types of radiation; they ring just as loudly if they locate nuclear-bomb material or contaminated steel or, for that matter, bananas, which emit radiation from the isotope potassium-40. So far, the result has been a cacophony of false alarms, which, in most cases, are caused by naturally occurring radiation that has found its way from soil or rock into manufactured products such as ceramic tiles. In addition, people who have recently received medical treatments with radioactive isotopes such as thorium can set off the detectors. At baseball's All-Star

It's thought that there are some fifty-four thousand licensed batches of radioactive materials in the U.S. that could be used in a dirty bomb.

Game in Detroit in 2005, unobserved NEST scientists screened tens of thousands of fans entering the stadium, and their sensors rang just once—reacting to the former Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham, who was radioactive from a recent doctor's visit.

Detritus from nuclear commerce that has slipped through American and international regulatory systems is another periodic source of alarms, and one that has proved to be a greater cause of concern. Virtually none of the loose material detected so far would be useful to a terrorist seeking to build a fission weapon—a bomb of the sort that was dropped on Hiroshima. A disquieting fraction of it, however, might be useful for what the American defense bureaucracy calls a "radioactive dispersal device," more commonly known as a dirty bomb. There is recent evidence, too, that Al Qaeda-inspired radicals are pursuing such a weapon.

The term "dirty bomb" can refer to a wide variety of devices, but generally it describes one that would use a conventional explosive such as dynamite to release radioactive material into the air. The initial explosion and its subsequent plume might kill or sicken a dozen or perhaps as many as a few hundred people, depending on such factors as wind and the bomb-maker's skill. If the weapon was particularly well made, employing one of the most potent and long-lived types of radioactive materials that are used in medicine and in the food industry, it might also cause considerable economic damage—perhaps rendering a number of city blocks uninhabitable. Radioactive ground contamination cannot easily be scrubbed away, so it might be necessary to tear down scores of buildings and cart the rubble to disposal sites. It's easy to imagine what the impact of such an attack would be if the contaminated area was, say, a quarter of the East Village, or the Seventh Arrondissement of Paris.

Charles Ferguson is a former nuclear submarine officer trained in physics; he left the Navy for a career in security studies and is currently a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. In 2003, he co-wrote an unclassified report titled "Commercial Radioactive Sources: Surveying the Security Risks." About two years later, F.B.I. agents working on an international terrorism case asked to meet with him. They brought a document showing that some of his report had been downloaded onto the computer of a British citizen named Dhiren Barot, a Hindu who had converted to Islam. Barot, it turned out, had been communicating with Al Qaeda about a plan to detonate a dirty bomb in Britain, and he had used a highlighting pen on a printout of Ferguson's study while conducting his research.

The report described how large amounts of certain commercial radioactive materials might pose a danger to a terrorist who tried to handle them. "This seems to have worried him," Ferguson told me, referring to Barot, "so he decided to look at smoke detectors." Some detectors contain slivers of americium-241; the isotope's constant emission of radiation creates a chemical process that screens for smoke. Barot informed his Al Qaeda handlers that he was thinking about buying ten thousand smoke detectors to make his bomb. In fact, to make a device that would be even remotely effective, Ferguson said, he would have had to buy more than a million. "Either his reading comprehension was poor or he was evading the assignment," Ferguson told me. In Britain, last October, Barot pleaded guilty to terrorism-related charges.

Barot appears to have been only marginally more competent than Jose Padilla, the hapless American convert to Islam who travelled to Pakistan, met with Al Qaeda leaders, and then flew to the United States, where he was arrested amid great fanfare, in June 2002. John Ashcroft, then the Attorney General, held a press conference in which he accused Padilla of "exploring a plan" to build a dirty bomb, charges that were later omitted from an indictment against him.

The Barot and Padilla cases raise a strategic question—whether it is worth setting up an expensive, imperfect system whose effectiveness would be greatest against slow-witted terrorists. The Bush Administration is now spending about four hundred million dollars annually on radiation-detector research, but nuclear physicists who have studied the technology disagree about how discriminating these sensors might become. One point on which everyone agrees, however, is that, of all the potentially dangerous radioactive isotopes, it will always be most difficult to detect highly enriched uranium-235, one of the two materials, along with plutonium, used to make fission weapons. Unless it is being compressed to explode, highly enriched uranium is a low-energy isotope that does not emit much radioactivity—it is "dull," in the lexicon employed by scientists in the

"I feel bad about Nora Ephron's neck."

field. This makes it relatively easy to shield inside lead casing, or to mask by surrounding it with brighter isotopes. Plutonium, by comparison, is fairly bright, and many of the most dangerous isotopes that could be used in dirty bombs, such as cesium-137 and cobalt-60, are brighter still. Radiation sensors, then, will always be more effective against a Dhiren Barot than against, say, the Pakistani nuclear scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan, a metallurgist who has spent many years studying fission weapons and highly enriched uranium, as well as the challenges of international smuggling.

It is common, in defense studies, to evaluate an adversary on the basis of capability and intent. Pakistan has a nuclear-weapons capability, but its government, however fragile it may be, is presumed to have no hostile intentions toward the United States. Al Qaeda, on the other hand, has demonstrated hostile intentions but has little known nuclear capability. Osama bin Laden has declared that the acquisition of nuclear weapons is a religious duty, and it is well documented that he tried to buy uranium during the mid-nineteen-nineties while he was living in Sudan. (Like many other would-be purchasers of black-market nuclear material, he apparently fell victim to a scam.) After September 11th, bin Laden met with Pakistani nuclear scientists to discuss weapons issues. More recently, Al Qaeda-inspired radicals have sought nuclear materials. "We know they have a significant appetite and they have been searching for different materials, in different venues, for the past several years," Vahid Majidi, an assistant director of the F.B.I., who is in charge of the bureau's newly formed weapons-of-mass-destruction directorate, told me. "The question becomes our vigilance and their ability to execute."

Last September, the Nuclear Threat Initiative posted a translation of a message that appeared on the Web and was attributed to Abu Ayyub al-Masri, the leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq. The speaker called for experts in "chemistry, physics, electronics, media and all other sciences, especially nuclear scientists and explosives experts." He continued, "We are in dire need of you. . . . The field of jihad can satisfy your scientific ambitions, and the large American bases are good places to test your unconventional weapons, whether biological or dirty, as they call them."

The available evidence, then, suggests that while jihadi leaders might like to acquire a proper fission weapon, their pragmatic plans seem to run to dirty bombs—a more plausible ambition. Among other things, the international nuclear black market holds more promise for dirty-bomb builders than for those who are interested in fission weapons. In all the cases of nuclear smuggling reported to the International Atomic Energy Agency since the collapse of the Soviet Union, none have involved significant amounts of fissionable materials. (There have been at least two cases in which a seller possessing small amounts of highly enriched uranium promised that he could get much more but was arrested before the claim could be tested; the most recent of these occurred in the former Soviet republic of Georgia, in 2006.) By comparison, the I.A.E.A. has recorded about three dozen black-market smuggling incidents through 2004 involving radiological isotopes in quantities that would be useful for a destructive dirty bomb, according to European diplomats who have analyzed the records. It would not be simple to build a damaging device with these materials. Still, Peter Zimmerman, who served as the chief scientist of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee from 2001 to 2003, said, "I think there are Al Qaeda people who, given finely divided material, could think of very creative and malicious ways to use it. Why hasn't it happened? The answer is we've been lucky."

The Bush Administration has not assigned the same urgency to the dirty-bomb threat that it has to the threat of a terrorist attack using a fission weapon. Fred Iklé, who served as the Under-Secretary of Defense for Policy in the Reagan Administration and has consulted on homeland-defense matters for the Bush Administration, told me that he and his colleagues have been considerably more concerned about a full-blown nuclear-weapons conspiracy, which would have the potential to trigger a worldwide economic depression and force millions of Americans to flee major cities. By contrast, even the worst dirty-bomb event, Iklé said, would be less than "a Katrina."

Last year, analysts at the Department of Homeland Security divided the threat of a weapon-of-mass-destruction attack against the United States into two categories, "catastrophic" and "limited," according to Maureen I. McCarthy, a senior adviser in the department's intelligence and analysis office. A catastrophic attack, in this taxonomy, would cause ten thousand or more casualties and fifty billion to a hundred billion dollars in economic damage, and would produce a "major global policy shift," McCarthy said last November, at an intelligence symposium. A limited attack might produce a hundred to a thousand casualties and would be confined to a single region, although it might also have "global political consequences." The D.H.S. intelligence analysts placed a fission-weapon attack, the use of some biological agents, and an outbreak of hoof-and-mouth disease in the catastrophic category (the latter in part because it might require the closure of national borders for up to ninety days). Dirty bombs fell into the limited category. From the very beginning, fear of a fission bomb and its consequences has influenced American thinking about the costs and benefits of possible defenses against nuclear terrorism.

The Washington office of Los Alamos National Laboratory is in a modern building on the south side of the Mall, near a busy hotel. Richard Wagner has a spacious office on the second floor, which he has filled with color photographs of nature scenes. He is seventy years old, a trim man with a white mustache and a calm, precise demeanor. Wagner is a physicist who entered the field of nuclear weapons during the nineteen-sixties. He rose to become the deputy director of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and, for five years during the Reagan Administration, served as the Pentagon's principal civilian adviser on nuclear weapons. He chaired an intelligence advisory board at the Pentagon during the Clinton years. At that time, he undertook the first of three studies on how the United States might erect a defense against a nuclear sneak attack. As much as anyone, Wagner is convinced of the need to employ radiation sensors in a national shield.

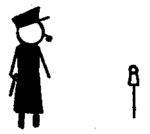
Wagner recalled, when I visited him on a recent wintry afternoon, that his interest in nuclear terrorism began during the early nineteen-seventies, when an F.B.I. agent arrived at Livermore carrying an extortion note. The F.B.I. man wanted to know if the threat, which involved a plan to blow up a nuclear device, was plausible. It was not, as it happened, but the incident, and several others like it during that period, got Wagner and a colleague at Livermore, Bill Nelson, thinking about what they would have done if they ever faced a serious case.

The subject had received remarkably little attention. In 1946, Robert Oppenheimer, the physicist who supervised the building of the first atom bombs, told Congress that three or four men "could destroy New York" by sneaking a nuclear weapon into the city. When a senator asked how such a weapon, smuggled in a crate or a suitcase, could be detected, Oppenheimer replied, "With a screwdriver." It was not until the early seventies that the issue was revived inside the defense bureaucracy—stimulated, in part, by the publication of John McPhee's "The Curve of Binding Energy," which drew on interviews with the theoretical physicist Theodore B. Taylor, an innovator in nuclear-weapons design. Taylor spoke about the possibility that an individual, perhaps an American citizen, could build a fission bomb. In one striking passage, he holds a sliver of metallic uranium-235 in his hands as he speculates, "If ten per cent of this were fissioned, it would be enough to knock down the World Trade Center." As a result of these warnings, Wagner recalled, "the government was getting more sensitive to the possibility that this might happen."

At the time, the dominant fear was that a bomb-builder would issue an extortion demand; the government would then have to find him in a hurry and dismantle his weapon. "Our job was to search, and then, if we ever found anything, do something safe with it," Wagner said. "It was the threat object that was fixed, and we were moving. And the idea of it being the other way around, the threat object moving toward the U.S. or around the U.S., and the detectors being fixed, which is part of the current paradigm—I don't remember that as being much in our thinking." To address such possibilities, Wagner helped to create NEST.

Wagner returned to the subject as part of a 1996 Summer Study sponsored by the Pentagon. The Soviet Union had collapsed, and black-market smuggling of nuclear materials had become an acute concern in the Clinton Administration. This time, Wagner was influenced by Fred Iklé, who has adapted some of Ted Taylor's concerns during the post-Cold War period. (In 2006, Iklé published a book entitled "Annihilation from Within: The Ultimate Threat to Nations.") Iklé's work, Wagner said, made him aware that a plausible attacker might be a terrorist group or a nation-state acting by covert means; the threat now, therefore, "was not just a nut, but it was part of a strategic sea change."

Wagner presented his ideas for a national-defense system to Defense Secretary William Cohen. He proposed an approach based on linked, computerized, intelligent radiation sensors—a system that would involve a very large number of detectors. A version of this concept had been secretly tested in North Las Vegas, where scientists drove through webs of linked sensors with a radioactive device; each time one pinged, the computers would analyze an accumulating portrait of the trajectory of the radioactive device. Cohen said he feared that the system would run afoul of the Posse Comitatus Act, which limits the military's intervention in domestic security. Jamie Gorelick, a former deputy attorney general who had become a Pentagon adviser, disagreed, but Cohen replied, as Wagner recalled it, " 'Well, it may not be illegal, but, man, it would be bad politics for D.O.D. to be seen to be getting ready to go out there and mess around in the U.S., in the states.' And Jamie said, 'Think what the politics would be like the morning after the explosion.' And, literally, Bill Cohen—I mean, good guy, I thought, a good Secretary of Defense—just couldn't say anything more. . . . And so nothing happened." An aide to Cohen said that he did not recall the discussion.



In March of 2002, Wagner was appointed to lead a new Defense Department task force on the same subject. Its members interviewed more than seventy scientists and analysts at the C.I.A., the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the national nuclear-weapons laboratories. Wagner and his colleagues chose "to concentrate almost exclusively on the nuclear-explosive threat," treating dirty bombs as a "lesser-included case," according to the final report, which was published in June of 2004. "A very rough estimate for civil detector deployments for all layers in the United States and overseas—along roads, at ports and airports, around and within cities, etc.—is one hundred thousand to four hundred thousand detectors," the report states. Depending on the model chosen, the cost of that many detectors would easily exceed ten billion dollars.

Wagner recommended an ambitious research program to address the problem of detecting highly enriched uranium; he foresaw a system that would be close to foolproof against a sophisticated attacker, perhaps one who had access to the resources of a hostile government. The task force acknowledged that even the best radiation-sensor system imaginable would be vulnerable to creative enemies, but added that "over the course of history, defenses that are far from perfect have played vital strategic roles."

Wagner told me that his faith in radiation-detection technology derives in part from the progress that has been made in cosmic-ray and particle physics. "Today, if you're looking for a neutrino from a pulsar in the next galaxy," he said, a scientist "can detect one event per year and reject the millions of background events." The goal of new defense research, he continued, should be to bring "advanced technologies out of the academic community" and learn how to apply them at border posts and truck stops.

It should be possible, Wagner said, by way of example, to detect the dull signature of highly enriched uranium by spraying out other kinds of radiation, perhaps from an aircraft, and then search for an echo, roughly the way sonar works—an approach that's likely to create health problems for civilian popula-

LANDSCAPE WITH THE FALL OF ICARUS

How could I have failed you like this?
The narrator asks

The object. The object is a box
Of ashes. How could I not have saved you,

A boy made of bone and blood. A boy
Made of a mind. Of years. A hand

And paint on canvas. A marble carving.
How can I not reach where you are

And pull you back. How can I be
And you not. You're forever on the platform

Seeing the pattern of the train door closing.
Then the silver streak of me leaving.

What train was it? The number six.
What day was it? Wednesday.

We had both admired the miniature mosaics
Stuck on the wall of the Met.

That car should be forever sealed in amber.
That dolorous day should be forever

Embedded in amber.
In garnet. In amber. In opal. In order

To keep going on. And how can it be
That this means nothing to anyone but me now.

—*Mary Jo Bang*

tions. Even if that difficulty could not be overcome, he continued, such technology could be useful in enemy territory if it was necessary to do a quick search for hidden nuclear bombs. Indeed, Fred Iklé told me that the Pentagon is now conducting this sort of research.

Wagner presented his grand plan to Donald Rumsfeld, then the Secretary of Defense, in early June, 2004. Ronald Reagan, the political father of ballistic-missile defense, had just died, and Rumsfeld, who was enthusiastic about Wagner's ideas, said that he would begin discussing the plan with Cabinet members when he saw them at Reagan's funeral. With support from Vice-President Dick Cheney, five months later the White House approved the idea, and the Department of Homeland Security decided to roll out detectors immediately, even though research into the more difficult problems of radiation sensing had barely begun. Because there was nothing else available, the department initially bought commercial machines of the type used, for example, by American steel mills to prevent contaminated scrap from entering their facilities. To Wagner's disappointment, the number and sophistication of these sensors fell considerably short of what had been envisioned.

From Hadrian's Wall to the Maginot Line to ballistic-missile defense, Emperors and Presidents have often preferred dramatic defensive innovations, even implausible ones, to incremental improvements. Radiation sensing is, of course, a passive defense, similar to a fence. Missile defense, by contrast, may be destabilizing, because it encourages states that hold missiles to improve their arsenals. Widespread radiation detection might prompt terrorists and criminals to improve their smuggling techniques, but it cannot, in itself, change the military balance.

Jeffrey Lewis, a nonproliferation specialist at the New America Foundation, said that radiation sensors had probably attracted support within the Bush Administration because they appeal to the instincts of defense thinkers who want to act boldly in the world but are also, at heart, isolationists. "You don't have to go mess with the difficult diplomacy of getting the Pakistanis to secure their material if you can ring the country with interceptors, or ring the country with detectors," he said. "Even if it's ineffective, it's something that we can do entirely ourselves—that's just really appealing to these guys."

Critics of Wagner's ideas say that he is too optimistic about the long-term potential of sensor technology, and that heavy spending on detectors will divert resources from the more important work of securing or eliminating dangerous nuclear materials—plutonium, highly enriched uranium, and dirty-bomb components. There are, for example, roughly a hundred and thirty-five civilian research reactors worldwide, including a number in the United States, that continue to use highly enriched uranium; some of these facilities have worrisome security. Sensors will never be effective enough against smuggled highly enriched uranium to justify the cost, Thomas Cochran, the director of the nuclear program at the Natural Resources Defense Council, argues. And while detectors might be more effective against dirty-bomb isotopes, Cochran says, the risks don't justify the expenditures. "That's not to say you should do nothing, but most of these things are going to be caught by good intelligence and not by the borders," Cochran said. He believes that the country would be much safer much faster if the federal government would concentrate on the painstaking challenge of reducing the number of nuclear weapons and materials at home and abroad.

Bush Administration officials I spoke

"Who's going to finish your sentences?"

• •

with said that they are already spending more than one billion dollars each year to secure nuclear materials in Russia and elsewhere. "Obviously, the very first thing you want to do is make sure that nuclear warheads and special nuclear material within known facilities is secure," William Tobey, who oversees nonproliferation programs at the National Nuclear Security Administration, said. "But work is either under way or complete at all such facilities that we've been allowed access to in Russia. So, then, once you've got that work under way, you want to make sure that if, for some reason, your systems are not perfect—and our systems are human, so they're likely not to be perfect—that you've got another way of managing the problem. And that becomes detection at borders."

The defense bureaucracy that George W. Bush and Dick Cheney have built seems to gravitate toward military men and others who share Cheney's sense that the terrorist attacks of September 11th were transformational. Joseph Krol, who oversees NEST, for example, is a retired rear admiral who was in charge of Navy operations at the Pentagon when American Airlines Flight 77 struck the building; twenty-eight men and women under his command died that day. "The idea of a nuclear event is a low-probability event, but we have taken it seriously, to the extent that we have developed a real capability," he told me. "You could look at it and say, 'Well, maybe you're spending a little too much money on this low-probability event.' But the outcomes of such an event are so disastrous that it's worth our attention."

On September 9, 2004, a division of Halliburton dispatched from Russia to Houston, via air freight, a diagnostic tool used in oil fields which contained eighteen and a half curies of americium-241. (A curie is a measure of radioactivity.) That much americium, a Department of Energy official said, "would make a pretty nasty dirty bomb." The tool passed through Amsterdam and Luxembourg and then cleared Customs at John F. Kennedy International Airport on October 9th, where it was supposed to be picked up by a freight company and sent on to Houston. But the shipment disappeared. Nobody at Halliburton, which relied in part on outside shipping contractors, noticed that it was missing until February 7th. Halliburton's Radiation Safety officer contacted the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's operations center the following day. The F.B.I. immediately sent agents to search for the missing tool, according to documents and statements later obtained by the staff of Representative Edward J. Markey, of Massachusetts. By using surveillance-camera footage at Kennedy, the agents tracked the shipment to a warehouse outside Boston, where the americium had been trucked by mistake and set aside. A subsequent N.R.C. inspection of Halliburton found that workers in the company's shipping department were "often unaware of the specifics of the routing of each shipment" of radioactive materials.

The Bush Administration's fixation on radiation sensors has not been accompanied by a comparably ambitious drive to fund, for example, increased inspections of companies that hold commercial nuclear material that could be used to build dirty bombs, and, as a result, the country's regulatory system in this area remains strikingly weak. For decades, the purpose of government regulation of trade in portable nuclear materials was to protect workers and the public from the effects of accidental exposure to radiation; much of the day-to-day responsibility rested on compliance by private businesses. Until September 11th, the possibility that a terrorist might mount an attack using commercial radioactive isotopes received very little attention. In 2002, after it had become clear that Al Qaeda or its followers might be seeking radioactive material, the N.R.C. and the Department of Energy formed a task force of physicists and engineers to study precisely what kinds, in what amounts, might be used effectively for dirty bombs. The I.A.E.A. conducted a similar study. The scientists who participated struggled with questions of bomb engineering and malicious intent which they had never before considered; among other things, they had to decide what level of skill could reasonably be attributed to an attacker. Edward McGaffigan, a commissioner at the N.R.C., said they assumed that they would be dealing with someone who knew some science— "Not supersmart, but certainly well above Jose Padilla." The result, in 2003, was a new system for identifying which materials were truly dangerous.

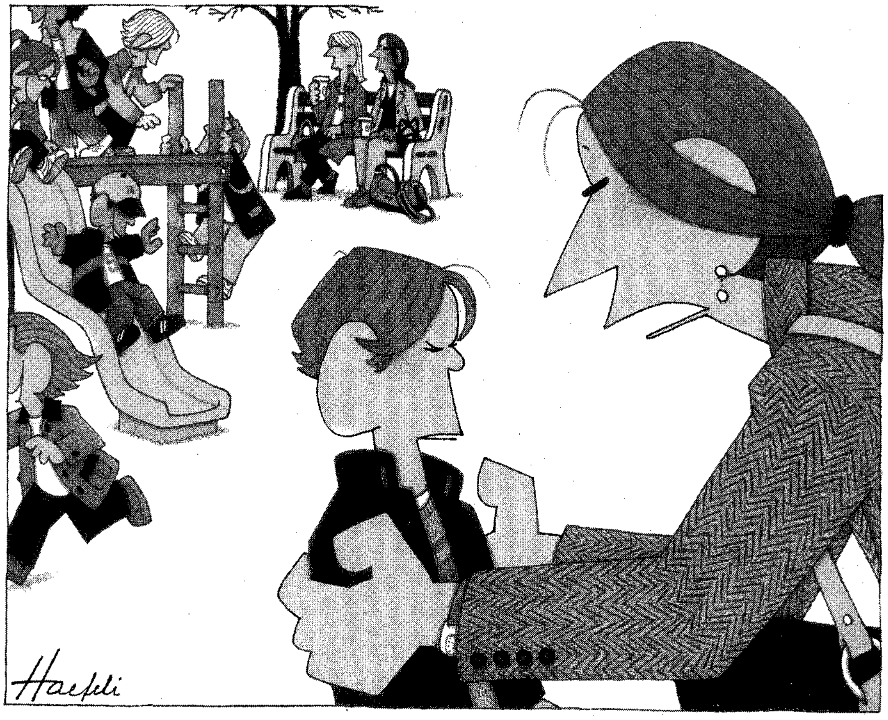
The final official list contains only fifteen risky isotopes. (Other commercial isotopes, such as polonium, which was employed in London last autumn to murder the former Russian spy Alexander Litvinenko, can kill individuals or small groups but cannot cause damaging long-term ground contamination; these materials are not classified as a security risk.) Because of their widespread availability and their potency, the isotopes of greatest concern are cesium, cobalt, and americium. There are, for example, several hundred irradiation machines in the United States that employ large amounts of cobalt and cesium, and thousands more of these machines are scattered around the world under light control—Ethiopia has at least one, and Ukraine has at least a hundred. Investigators in Markey's office, searching the Web, found one such machine, with its entire stockpile of cobalt, available for free, provided that a customer would haul the material away; the machine was in Lebanon.

In the United States, between 1994 and 2005, the N.R.C. recorded sixty-one domestic cases of stolen or lost isotopes in amounts that would clearly be useful to someone making a dirty bomb, although the majority of these involved iridium-192, which loses its potency fairly quickly. It is not clear whether the commission's records describe all or even most of the problem cases. Among other things, the N.R.C.'s records of materials that entered the American marketplace before 1994 are generally unreliable. Problematic batches from earlier eras are missing. Some are associated with the bizarre case of the Gammator, a nineteen-sixties-era research contraption filled with dangerous amounts of cesium that was distributed by the Atomic Energy Commission to schools, hospitals, and private firms to promote nuclear understanding. Several Gammators sent to New York and New Jersey, as well as other places, have never been found.

There is continued demand for isotopes that can attack cancer cells, sterilize medical or industrial instruments, or efficiently detect cracks in critical metal structures, such as oil pipelines, in remote locations. In the United States, there are now about fifty-four thousand licensed batches of radioactive materials that could be used in a dirty bomb, according to the N.R.C. The N.R.C. recently issued classified orders to American licensees—hospitals, clinics, universities, and corporations—instructing them to improve on-site security, but the commission lacks the budget to follow up with frequent inspections. Most of the N.R.C.'s revenue comes from fees extracted from nuclear utilities and businesses, not from Congress, and the nuclear industry lobbies heavily to keep its payments down.

Under the country's patchwork system of state and federal regulation, most companies that hold dangerous commercial materials are inspected not by the N.R.C. but by thirty-four "Agreement" states, which have varying priorities and often inadequate resources. In December, 2005, investigators with the Government Accountability Office, who were testing the reliability of the country's radiation-detector system, successfully imported at simultaneous crossings on the Canadian and Mexican borders a dangerous quantity of dirty-bomb material by using false license and freight documents. Radiation sensors rang, but Customs officials did not question the validity of the import papers and, acting on their own discretion, allowed the material to go through. Even today, some of the states that are supposed to help Customs check such license records do not staff their operations centers around the clock.

Companies and hospitals with large amounts of cobalt and cesium have no easy way to dispose of these substances if they cut back on a line of research or go out of business. "There is absolutely no way to dispose of that material commercially—I think that's a real problem," said Julia Whitworth, who leads a project at Los Alamos National Laboratory to recover and secure these "orphaned sources." In the past three years, Los Alamos has collected about five hundred large batches of cobalt, an indication of how many unwanted units of this substance are around. Licenses granted each year by the N.R.C. only exacerbate the problem, because the federal government has never built adequate disposal sites. Some companies just dump this material illegally or inadvertently. So much discarded radioactive material courses through the country's scrap-metal piles that steel companies face a serious risk of contaminating their plants and workers by accidentally melting hot junk. There have been thirty-five such accidents in the United States since 1982; cleanup costs can run as high as twenty-four million dollars per event, according to John



"You have to be sensitive to the fact that other children are inferior to you."

Wittenborn, an attorney who represents the steel industry.

The rules governing commercial materials make up the small print in the *Federal Register*. In America since September 11th, the political rewards and the big budgets have gone not to those who want to emphasize stricter regulations but to those who promise to catch terrorists in the act.

The Domestic Nuclear Detection Office has a new-car smell. Its growing staff—about two hundred scientists, F.B.I. agents, military officers, and other officials—recently moved to larger quarters, a granite-and-glass building six blocks from the White House. Vayl Oxford, the director, who was appointed by President Bush, is a 1974 graduate of West Point. He is a mandarin in the national-security bureaucracy who wields influence by accumulating knowledge about complex, classified government operations, but whose role is largely invisible to the public. Oxford retired from the military in 1992; since then he has worked in the nuclear-weapons field, in such fictional-sounding divisions of the Pentagon as the Defense Special Weapons Agency. For a time, he studied the blast effects of nuclear bombs, and later, during the Clinton Administration, he worked on what he described as "the offensive aspects of counter-proliferation," meaning that he helped to evaluate weapons that could destroy an adversary's chemical, biological, or nuclear facilities.

Oxford speaks in the clipped vernacular of his specialty; he refers to fission bombs and dirty bombs together as "rad-nuke," and to the problem of chemical and biological weapons as "chem-bio." Explaining his thinking after September 11th, he said, "We always thought that the rad-nuke issue was a prevention issue, as opposed to chem-bio, which is a lot about how fast and how effectively you can respond to an attack."

We met recently in his office, where the model of a jet fighter on which he once worked is prominently displayed. He told me that his mandate from the White House has been "to develop what we called 'a global nuclear-detection architecture.' " Oxford said that he sees threats from varied enemies, actual and hypothetical. "You've got the influence of A. Q. Khan—that, in my mind, is pretty devastating," he said. "I worry about the fragility of a government in Pakistan. What happens to its arsenal? I worry about weird uses of North Korean weapons, as opposed to a ballistic-missile attack that is easily attributable. . . . A lot of people think that at D.H.S. all we're focussed on is Al Qaeda. That's not here. This is looking at the nuclear threat from a broader perspective, and trying to figure out how to deal with it."

I.C.U.
WAITING

"We even tried pouring red wine down his gullet."

To confront the threat of a dirty-bomb attack, Oxford favors an improved system for real-time tracking of all commercial nuclear materials in the United States, perhaps using tags that can be monitored by satellite. His office is urging manufacturers of large commercial sources to fortify their machines against attack, and he would like to see some materials replaced with less risky alternatives. Such campaigning has added a new degree of urgency to the Bush Administration's assessment of the threat. Later this year, the federal government will hold its annual, classified exercise involving top officials (known as TOP-OFF), in which these officials rehearse responses to a major disaster scenario. This year's scenario, an official familiar with the planning told me, will posit three simultaneous dirty-bomb explosions.

Radiation detectors paid for by the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office currently screen about ninety per cent of cargo entering the United States from Canada and Mexico, as well as a similar percentage of private cars and trucks; they are also used to check about ninety per cent of incoming shipping containers. Oxford said that he plans to oversee the installation of enough detectors to screen ninety-eight per cent of imported maritime cargo by the end of the year. Creative terrorists, like drug smugglers, might then try to enter with small boats, or sneak across the land border, he said. Therefore, he is also trying to develop a more mobile system of radiation sensors on Coast Guard vessels, and at interior locations such as weigh stations, bridges, and tunnels.

Oxford is promoting the next generation of sensor, called the Advanced Spectroscopic Portal, which has been undergoing tests in New York and at the Nevada Test Site. This machine can distinguish bananas from cesium, but it will be no more sensitive than current detectors in its ability to locate highly enriched uranium, a Department of Energy official involved with the detection program said.

Finding highly enriched uranium is "a really hard problem," Oxford conceded. Customs inspectors already use imaging equipment to scan for unusual shielding inside some shipping containers, but his office is supporting research to investigate more mobile and effective systems. "We agree that solving this through passive systems alone is not sufficient," Oxford said. He compared the challenge to that undertaken during fifty years of research to support antisubmarine warfare during the Cold War. There, too, the challenge, he said, was to "extract unique signatures out of a very cluttered environment. It's not just the detector itself but the software algorithm and the signals-processing" that make such a system more or less effective.

Even crude or faulty sensor systems might expose a sophisticated attacker, Oxford said. "I don't think it's ever possible to provide a hundred-per-cent shield; I don't think ballistic-missile defense ever believed that they would be able to do that. I think that every step and every defensive layer that we put in complicates an adversary's plan to be able to do this, and gives us other opportunities, to use other means . . . to try to identify that something may be planned."

Fifteen years ago, many feared that a nuclear weapon might be bought or stolen by terrorists in the former Soviet Union. The country had large stockpiles of fission weapons and highly enriched uranium that were, in some cases, so poorly inventoried that nobody could say for sure how much material existed. Although Russia's resurgent security police and years of investment in nuclear security by the United States and other countries have reduced the dangers, international organized-crime networks still thrive in Russia and the smaller countries on its southern rim. The A. Q. Khan case has led some in the American defense bureaucracy to conclude that Pakistan is now a greater problem than Russia. India has large amounts of fissile material at civilian facilities and is a site of recurring, violent terrorist conspiracies. North Korea's dictator, Kim Jong Il, has a record of kidnapping and other erratic acts. A gloomy mind can readily devise plausible scenarios for nuclear terrorism in which any of these places might be a source of weapons or materials. As for potential targets, Al Qaeda's longstanding interest in New York, and its status as the largest seaport on the East Coast, has made the city, along with Washington, D.C., the focus of continual attention by the federal government since September 11th.

Building a fission weapon, or even detonating a stolen one, would be a challenging task for conspirators who didn't have a government's budget and infrastructure behind them, but people who are knowledgeable about nuclear weapons believe that it can be done. The most difficult aspect of such a project is acquiring a sufficient amount of highly enriched uranium or plutonium; the engineering work required to make a crude bomb could likely be mastered by a group of scientists—perhaps as few as a dozen. To prove the point, in a recent article in *Foreign Policy* Jeffrey Lewis and Peter Zimmerman described a hypothetical terrorist plan to build a basic fission weapon on a hundred-and-fifty-acre ranch in a remote area of the United States. Their imaginary budget was ten million dollars, their team would consist of nineteen people, and they found that they could buy many of the parts required over the Internet. Their scheme was inspired by the more ambitious plans of the Japanese terrorist cult Aum Shinrikyo, which explored uranium mining in Australia during the nineteen-nineties before mounting a sarin-gas attack on the Tokyo subway. Any of these cases, however, would require a successful plan to move contraband nuclear materials across international borders; as with the movement of terrorists themselves, borders offer a relatively uncomplicated chance of detection. This ancient principle of defense, more than faith in the technology of radiation sensing, may explain the support that the Bush Administration's detector program has attracted so far.

In the meantime, America's radiation-sensing system is, at least for now, detecting radioactive briefcase clasps, manhole covers, and chafing dishes. These are among the contaminated products caught by detectors recently at border crossings; in New York's seaports alone, there have been twenty such cases. On a recent morning when I visited a sensor outpost at the Port of Newark, four young Customs officers with pistols strapped to their belts huddled in a booth filled with computers as trucks rumbled through a line of radiation portals, which are shaped like metallic archways. The officers had joined Customs thinking that they would mainly battle narcotics traffickers; now they spend most of their time on terrorism issues, and they know more about isotopes than some high-school physics teachers do. Each time an alert in their booth sounds, a polite, calm computer voice speaks to them, as it did when I stopped by: "Gamma alert, lane six." This happens more than two hundred times per day at the Port of New York and New Jersey.

The officers checked the driver's papers, scanned the truck's sides with a handheld isotope identifier, consulted their computer screens, and within minutes announced their conclusion: denture cleaners, potassium-40. They spoke in the bored, slightly sardonic tone common among police officers, as if they were reviewing a burglar's jimmying techniques.

At some point, perhaps after the expenditure of a great amount of money, it will probably be cops like these, and not scientists or defense theorists, who decide where radiation detection should rank on the long and diverse list of counterterrorism techniques. The Department of Homeland Security recently announced an initiative to experiment with the installation of radiation detection at some bridges, tunnels, roadways, and waterways leading into Manhattan; later, the department hopes to surround other cities. The N.Y.P.D. fears that the sensors might prove to be too costly and would generate too many false alarms. Nearly three hundred thousand cars and trucks cross the George Washington Bridge in both directions on an average day; without an efficient way to process radiation alerts, a single convoy of banana trucks could jam up traffic for hours. "There are a lot of possible concerns that could surface with it," Raymond Kelly, the N.Y.P.D.'s commissioner, told me. Yet, he said, "we see this as something certainly worth trying." Kelly wants to deploy rings of sensors fifty miles or more from New York, so there would be a better chance of spotting an incoming device. In February, he held talks with his counterparts in Connecticut and New Jersey. Still, Kelly said, the entire project remains "very conceptual in nature." ♦

OUR FAR-FLUNG CORRESPONDENTS

SEASON ON THE CHALK

From Ditchling Beacon to Épernay.

BY JOHN McPHEE

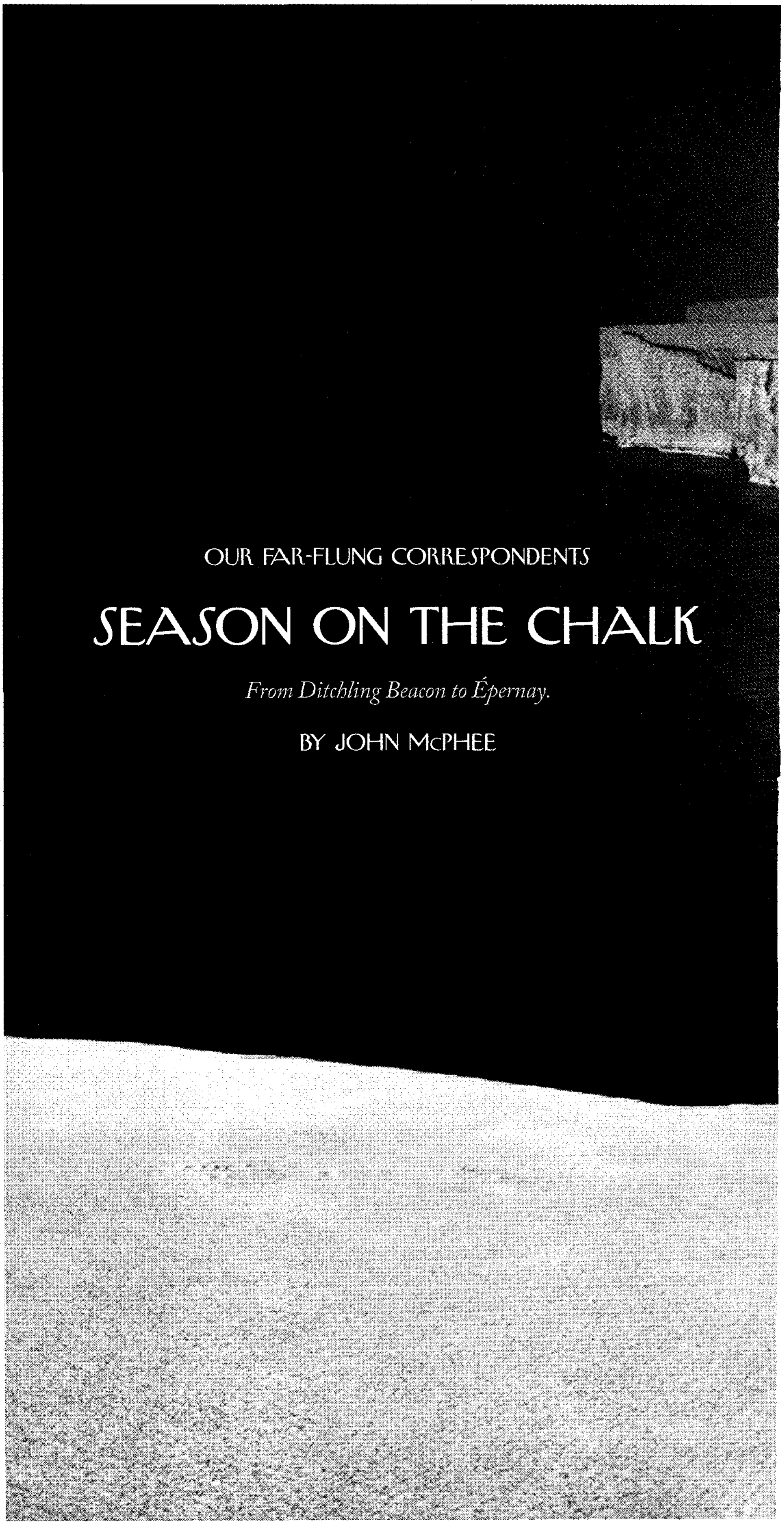
The massive chalk of Europe lies below the English Channel, under much of northern France, under bits of Germany and Scandinavia, under the Limburg Province of the Netherlands, and—from Erith Reach to Gravesend—under fifteen miles of the lower Thames. My grandson Tommaso appears out of somewhere and picks up a cobble from the bottom of the Thames. The tide is out. The flats are broad between the bank and the water. Small boats, canted, are at rest on the riverbed. Others, farther out on the wide river, are moored afloat—skiffs, sloops, a yawl or two. Tommaso is ten. The rock in his hand is large but light. He breaks it against the revetment bordering the Gordon Promenade, in the Riverside Leisure Area, with benches and lawns under oaks and chestnuts, prams and children, picnics under way, newspapers spread like sails, and, far up the bank, a stall selling ice cream. He cracks the cobble into jagged pieces, which are whiter than snow. Chalked graffiti line the revetment and have attracted the attention of Tommaso, who now starts his own with the letter "R."

One of the stranded skiffs is painted a bright orange, and large letters on its tilted-up side say "The Crown and Thistle Public House." A yellow skiff, also askew, says "The Terrace Tavern Public House." A red one represents "The George Inn, Queen Street." When the tide has turned and the skiffs are up on the water, the pubs race one another. This is the beginning of the Thames Estuary, where, in centuries gone, a thousand ships would be anchored, waiting to go up into London.

"O"

Tommaso is taking his time with these letters, because he is using an ambitious font. The lines that have formed the "R" and the "O" are four inches wide. An armada of swans, in single file, swims out from near shore and toward the center of the river—thirty-eight swans. Here, above the chalk, is where the Nellie, a cruising yawl, swung to her anchor, waiting for the tide to turn, while

> the tanned sails of the barges drifting up with the tide seemed to stand still in red clusters of canvas sharply peaked, with gleams of varnished sprits. A haze rested on the low shores that ran out to sea in vanishing flatness. The air was dark above Gravesend, and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful



Europe's chalk deposits started to accumulate some hundred million years ago. They grew at the

"SNOW, SEVEN SISTERS 1" (1991)/IPG BATTLE

rate of about a millimetre per century until they were more than three hundred metres thick. Photograph by John Holloway.

gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth.

Marlow then described to his friends on the yawl's deck his journey to the heart of darkness.

"C"

Tommaso goes to Fulham Prep, and recently bet a number of his classmates a pound apiece that he would not win the Form Prize. He won the Form Prize and went bankrupt.

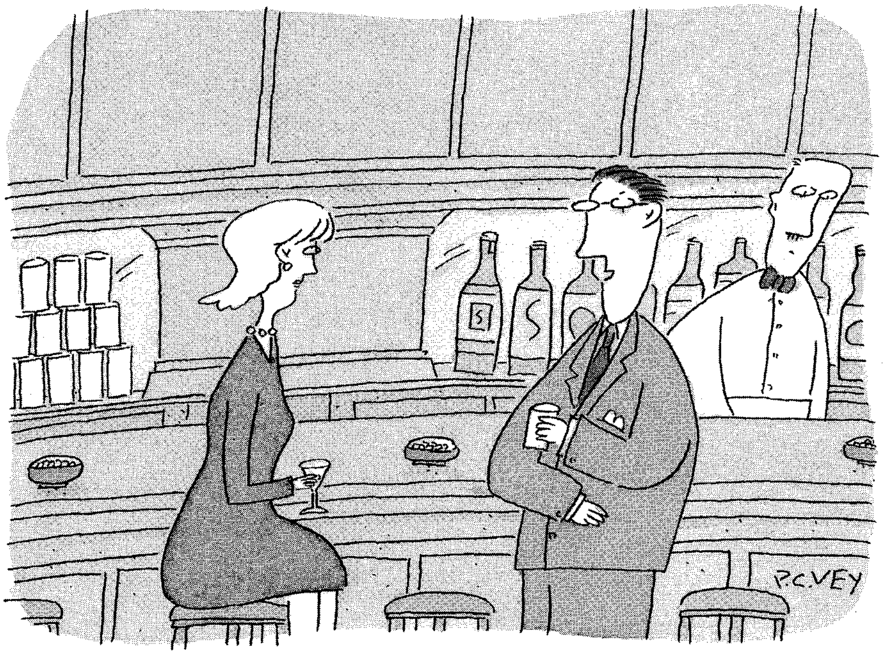
"K"

With his rendering of ROCK, he has won the admiration of his grandfather for his evident devotion to earth science. He has also drawn a crowd. Average age: seven. Quietly and respectfully, they watch this older artist, his concentration undisturbed. He leaves some space and begins a new word, with another "O." In the Nellie's time, the last decade of the nineteenth century, the river here at Gravesend was full of troop ships, cargo ships, and emigrant ships, waiting on tides. And more than tides. They sometimes waited for weeks before sailing. On hulks and barges, boatmen serving the ships lived on the river with their families and with their cats, dogs, chickens, sheep, and cows. Now downriver comes the Tor Belgia, out of London, with a six-deck rear house, followed by the Arco Humber, spewing bilge, a floating cadaver of ulcerated rust. Pilot boats, ratlike, scurry away from these tankers. Docked across the river in Tilbury is the Russian ship Annoya, of nine Cyrillic letters and a six-deck house. A motor yacht goes by, so elegant that it appears to be lost—seems to be seeking Lake Geneva.

"N"

ROCK ON. I didn't say he was William Butler Yeats. He is Tommaso U. P. McPhee, son of Luca Passaleva and Jenny McPhee, brother of six-year-old Leandro McPhee, who is the least quiet member of Tommaso's attentive crowd. With a large white "S," a second line begins, and gradually becomes SKI-MAN, a character in a screenplay that Tommaso has written and intends to direct. Backdropping this scene, up the bank above the prams and the Sunday papers, are the parapets and big guns of an eighteenth-century fort, vastly amplified in the nineteenth by Chinese Gordon of Khartoum, and meant to blow out of service anything afloat that might threaten London. Tommaso adds a peace symbol to his completed graffito.

East of Gravesend is a town called Chalk, with a thoroughfare called Chalk Road, a barber's called Chalk Cuts, and a neighborhood called Chalk Park, where mobile homes have tile roofs. In a cottage still standing on Chalk Road, Charles Dickens spent the honeymoon of his ill-fated marriage, picking at "The Pickwick Papers." The M2 runs on the chalk as far as Faversham, where the chalk drifts southeast to Deal and Dover and the Kentish cliffs above the English Channel. From the water, in the approach to Dover, the chalk cliffs under their cap of vegetation are like the filling in a broken wafer, a cross-sectional exposure of the nation's basement. More resistant than some rocks to the effects of weather, the chalk stands high, and its landform suggests on a magnified scale the swells and waves in the water beside it. This karst topography, as it is called, carries on toward London as the North Downs, and from any number of its high points the view to the south goes uninterrupted for thirty-odd miles before it is stopped by an east-west band of high chalk that more than suggests a range of mountains. The reciprocal scene, northward, from Devil's Dyke or Ditchling Beacon or almost anywhere on the ridgeline of the South Downs, was described by John Constable in 1824 as "perhaps the most grand and affecting natural landscape in the world—and consequently a scene the most unfit for a picture." Easily, instantly, your eyes take in a thousand square miles of low terrain in pastel greens and browns, a region too broad to be called a valley but known since Anglo-Saxon England as the Weald. "It is the business of a painter not to contend with nature," the surprising Constable explained, "but to make something out of nothing, in attempting which he must almost of necessity become poetical." And, true to his artistic standards, this surpassing English landscape painter sketched almost nothing of the hackneyed panorama of the Weald.



"The nuts are good, but I have a can of really good nuts back at my place."

The South Downs Way, a public and ancient footpath through fields and over stiles and under notably few trees, stays up on the highest ground between Eastbourne and Winchester—a hundred miles. In billows of chalk, the Downs rise from the sea and go on rising northward to elevations approaching a thousand feet, culminating in the escarpment that plunges to the Weald. The declivity is so steep that funiculars have been built to ascend it. Spring-line villages developed at the base, where waters come out of the chalk. To the Anglo-Saxons a weald was a woodland and a mountain was a dun. Words that were good enough for Caedmon and Bede are not for recycling now. So the Downs are up and the Weald is down, beyond the spring-line towns.

East of Ditchling Beacon, where bonfires signalled the approach of the Armada, the South Downs Way passes close to Breaky Bottom. This is a small, deep, roughly circular valley countersunk in the highest chalk, walled in on all sides by rims about a mile across—an enclosed coombe. A form of dry chalk valley, it has no stream. Not many miles from Brighton and Hove, it seems nonetheless as remote as a valley in Nevada. Sequestered, secretive, sheltered from its windswept environs, it has an intimate and fairly level floor that is covered with orderly rows of vines. I would like to say that I arrived on foot, coming off the ridge, but I was actually a passenger in an aqua Audi driven by H. G. T. P. Doyne-Ditmas, of Brighton. We came up past Piddinghoe on the River Ouse and on by steep fields full of rolled hay to a whitish chalk track, pitted and rutted, extending a mile and a half beyond a sign that said "No Through Road."

We descend, helically, and park under a horse chestnut near a flint wall, a house, a flint barn. We step into a scene of utter quiet. Call this the most peaceful place in Europe—willows over the flint garden wall, a line of poplars against the sky, cattle like brown pebbles far up the circumvallate grazings, fewer than few human inhabitants, proprietor nowhere in sight. He is in his kitchen, conferring with a buyer.

While we wait, we walk among the grapes—Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Seyval Blanc, as Doyne-Ditmas is aware, because he discovered Breaky Bottom some years ago, and tasted the still and the sparkling wines, and later rang up a former colleague of his—who had become Deputy Private Secretary to the Queen—and suggested that Her Majesty's government buy and serve this patriotic wine, especially the generic champagne. Think of it—English champagne! From the Palace, the former colleague said thank you very much but the government already are a Breaky Bottom customer, and the champagne—or, strictly speaking, the *méthode champenoise* sparkling wine—is much in use "for government entertainment, including entertainment by the Queen."

Doyne-Ditmas has a fraternal niece named Caroline, who was Princess Anne's head groom during Princess Anne's competitive equestrian years and is now one of Anne's ladies-in-waiting. At the equestrian events, Caroline was sometimes asked by Special Branch police officers if she was "related to Mr. Doyne-Ditmas of the Box." She affirmed that she was. The Box is MI5.

Peter Hall, proprietor and *viticulteur*, comes out of the house, says goodbye to his customer under the chestnut, and turns to us. He is wearing a white T-shirt, and he's a man of middle height, with friendly eyes, an intelligent pate, a fringe of white hair, a tanned face, a white beard, and a talent for non-stop talking. First off, he orients us to our surroundings by quoting "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Demetrius to Helena: "I'll run from thee and hide me in the brakes."

Next he tells us that his mother was French, his father English, and his brother died of AIDS in New York. His father was the author of a memoir on fly-fishing in Scotland. His brother is commemorated on the labels of Breaky Bottom's Cuvée Rémy Alexandre. Peter Hall says "vinn yard," accent on the "yard." "I've always liked small scale," he continues. "I'm happy to be the owner-driver of what I do." At the moment, he has only about fifty thousand bottles laid up in various stages of development. Recent government orders have brought him "thirteen thousand nine hundred pounds of taxpayers' money." We go into his flint barn. His fermentation tanks are from Italy. His wine press, French, looks expensive and a great deal less nauseating than a stomp of bare feet. It is a stainless cylinder with an interior bag. Come harvest, grapes go into the cylinder. The bag swells with compressed air and squeezes the grapes. The air goes out; then the bag refills, and squeezes the grapes a little more. How much did the thing cost?

"Twenty-five thousand quid," Peter Hall says.

Nobody says "quid" anymore, Doyne-Ditmas is silently reflecting.

The Breaky Bottom cave is not down in the chalk, as one would expect. It is a large space in the barn—sealed, insulated, firmly kept at twelve degrees Celsius by a pricey air-conditioner. How pricey?

"Ten thousand quid. To burrow into the chalk would have been a hundred thousand quid."

Peter Hall came here in the nineteen-sixties on an internship after taking an agricultural degree at Newcastle University. Breaky Bottom was a wheat and cattle farm. He lived "in a tiny cottage and worked for the farmer." After his year was up, he asked if he could stay another year. "As long as you don't talk so much," the farmer said. Peter married the farmer's daughter. They produced four children, and the farmer offered him a tenancy. Now the marriage is in the past, Peter has a different companion, and the farmer is dead.

On the six planted acres at the bottom of the dry chalk valley, the behavior of water is unpredictable. The coombe is, in effect, a giant cistern collecting rain, of which there is no shortage. But chalk is porous, and, in Peter's words, "the chalk takes all the water." When it receives so much that it can hold no more, this streamless basin develops a full-bore flood. Such an event occurs roughly once in five years, leaving almost enough time for a vintner to become complacent.

"I've flooded five times," Peter says.

What does that do to the vines?

"It buggers them up. Vines like their feet dry." Just as vines do around Reims and Épernay, in the province of Champagne, in northeastern France, where the wines owe their speciality in large part to the chalk that holds the roots of the vines. Chalk, like limestone, endows a fertile soil. The province has two principal areas, with differing bedrock—Wet Champagne, on sands and clays, and Dry Champagne, on younger chalk—and the Taittingers, Mumms, and Piper-Heidsiecks come off the chalk of Dry Champagne. Relatively dry Champagne. The chalk feeds water to the vines.

The kitchen in Breaky Bottom's farmhouse trails modern kitchens by about a hundred years and is a hundred times as pleasant, with its apparatus in heavy black iron, its slanting window light, its glasses and bottles on the blue oilcloth of a large wooden table. Listening to Peter Hall, we sit and sip, appreciate, spit. A pitcher is in service as a glass spittoon. A 2003 still wine is "like sucking a lemon at half time," we are told. "It's refreshing, zestful." A 1996 Müller-Thurgau is "elegantly shaped, like a Gewürztraminer, but it has backed off from there." The main events are the champagnes (a term he doesn't use). "This young '03 is pretty zesty, sharp, punchy stuff." This 1999 is "more rounded, bigger flavor—quite a drink. . . . I'm growing Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Seyval Blanc now principally with fizz in mind, to see what comes off this chalk." Already, his production is "preponderantly fizzy," and soon, he says, he might decide "to go a hundred per cent fizz."

"Why would you do that? The still wines are very good."

"If I had a herd of goats, I could sell milk to the local health-food store. If I made cheese, I could sell it for three times as much."

During the tasting, Peter has been smoking a rolled smoke. He rolls another. After taking the wines in his mouth, he gives them a good hard squish, making a gravelly, smoky sound like a bullfrog.

For my part, I am not ejecting a whole lot of what I am sipping, and I am getting a little drunk. Doyne-Ditmas, through all, has been patient, observant, unreadable. We came here before lunchtime intending to spend an hour, and it is now nearing three in the afternoon. Doyne-Ditmas and I have known each other since we went to Deerfield Academy, in western Massachusetts. He was sent there by the English-Speaking Union and stood out from everyone else as "the English exchange student." He had no cover then. He was the least anonymous student in the school. We concocted a plan that four years later I would enroll in his college at the University of Cambridge, which I did.

"I am now principally a sparkling-wine maker," Peter Hall says once more, after spitting out some '99. More broadly, he asserts that it is only a matter of time before "the U.K. will become prominent in sparkling wine." After all, Épernay is virtually next door, just a bit down the chalk. "From here, Champagne is two hundred and fifty miles southeast and you can virtually spit there."

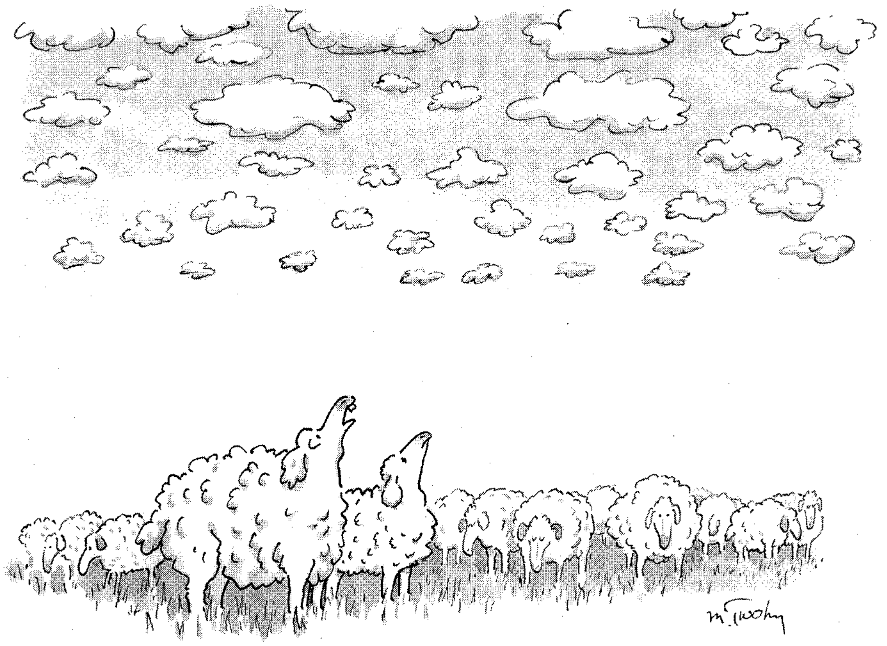
From Breaky Bottom out through Beachy Head, under the Channel, and up into Picardy, and on past Arras and Amiens, the chalk is continuous to Reims and Épernay. To drive the small roads and narrow lanes of Champagne is to drive the karstic downlands of Sussex and Surrey, the smoothly bold topography of Kentish chalk—the French ridges, long and soft, the mosaic fields and woodlots, the chalk boulders by the road in villages like Villeneuve-l'Archevêque. Here the French fieldstone is chalk, and the quarry stone—white drywalls, white barns, white churches. The chalk church of Orvilliers-Saint-Julien. The chalk around the sunflowers of Rigny-la-Nonneuse. The chalkstone walls at Marcilly-le-Hayer. Near Épernay, even the cattle are white; and vines like green corduroy run for miles up the hillsides in rows perpendicular to the contours, and the tops of the vines are so accordant that the vines up close look more like green fences, and the storky, long-legged tractors of Champagne straddle rows and run above the grapes.

This is a region of three hundred and twenty-three villages, spread mainly around the flaring skirts of the Montagne de Reims and below its dense upland forests. Verzy, Verzenay, Mailly-Champagne, Mutigny, Ay, Hautvillers, Châtillon-sur-Marne—each village is, among other things, a cru. Forty-four villages are premiers crus. Seventeen are grands crus. A couple of highways run past the villages, and small paved roads among them, but the lanes that traverse and connect the vineyards are for the most part little more than two ruts of scraped-off chalk. Small roadcuts in the steeper slopes among the vines expose above the chalk the sands, clays, and marls of younger age that have washed down off the mountain and veneered the chalk, resulting in what is looked upon as elixir soil for the signature wine of this province. Up in the vineyards over Ay, a Sunday afternoon in steady rain, the green vines glisten, while water on the chalk roads runs like milk. Your car goes up to its hubcaps in milk.

In the Église Abbatiale, in Hautvillers, only a few kilometres and a few hundred thousand vines above Ay, lie the bones of St. Nivard, some fourteen hundred years since they began forming inside his young body. He founded this Benedictine abbey, which, through centuries, has rung with quiet, as its church does today, if you are not disquieted by the low recorded sound of the Twenty-first Piano Concerto. This may be one of the few places on earth that could do without Mozart, introducing, as he does, a sense of sideshow in the vaulted space. Nivard's bones are viewable, casketed in glass, while on black stone set in the floor nearby are the words "Hic Jacet Dom Petrus Perignon . . . Plenus Paternoque Imprimis in Pauperes Amore." In the seventeenth century, Pierre Pérignon became the cellarer of the abbey, not exactly the sommelier, but not inexactly, either. His job was to gather provisions of all kinds, including wine, for the brothers' table. He was a skilled blender, according to the geologist James E. Wilson's "Terroir: The Role of Geology, Climate, and Culture in the Making of French Wines," but, contrary to Pérignon's worldwide reputation, he did not add to the wines the magic bits of sugar and yeast that enhance carbonation in the second fermentation and result in champagne as we know it and he did not. Later, he acquired the title Dom, or Master, and what is thought to have been his way is what is meant by the words *méthode champenoise* and *méthode traditionnelle* on the labels of American, Argentine, Australian, South African, Greek, Chilean, Israeli, Latvian, Spanish, English, and Canadian champagnes.

While the landscapes of Dry Champagne bear more than a cousinly resemblance to the Downs of southern England, the underground scene in Reims, Ay, and Épernay does not call to mind an air-conditioned barn. Deep in the French chalk are hundreds of kilometres of tunnels—straight-line tunnels, curvilinear tunnels, tunnels on various levels crisscrossing other tunnels—holding more than a billion bottles of champagne. In Épernay, on the much embattled Marne, the mansions and offices of Pol Roger, Perrier Jouet, Mercier, Moët & Chandon, and others are lined up on the two sides of the Avenue de Champagne and over something like a Russian coal mine. On three levels, Moët & Chandon alone has eighteen miles of tunnels. The white walls are cool, sticky, and damp, belying the dryness overhead. The name Champagne stems from Campania, of whose dusty fields Romans were reminded when they came here. The porous chalk absorbs rain as fast as it falls, and the year-round temperature down in the caves is wintry.

Dimly lighted passages reach so far into a mournful and brooding gloom that the eye is stopped not by rock but by darkness. Along the sides, as in a catacomb, are vaults, crypts—a seemingly endless series of crypts, typically six feet by sixteen feet, like one-fifth of your one-room apartment. The tight space notwithstanding, in each crypt lie some twenty thousand bottles of champagne. There are workrooms down here in the chalk, and among the many talents of the workers the most technologically advanced is riddling. It is two centuries old. When yeasted and sugared wines have lain flat long enough to build up their sparkle, the yeast and other sediments inside the bottles must be removed; and how does one do that without losing the bubbles? Enter the *veuve* Clicquot, the enological Edison, widowed in 1805 and left in control of her husband's Remois winery, where she became, in effect, the first riddler. She placed the ready bottles on an A-framed rack, tilting them neck down, and she gradually steepened the incline as weeks went by. Once a day or so—to dislodge the yeast from the bottle walls and to stir up the sediments—she gave each bottle a sharp turn to the right and a sharp turn back to the left, then stopped its rotation a little farther along than it had been. In the annals of addiction, not even whole Greek islands terraced to the sky in vines, or Falernian vats holding enough wine to intoxicate the Tenth Legion—not even the great Heidelberg tun—could be more emblematic than a portrait of a riddler in the chalk. One riddler can turn thirty thousand bottles a day, and with each turn, and each additional degree of tilt, the grubby items in near-suspension in the otherwise diaphanous fluid gravitate into the neck of the bottle. After eight weeks or so, a palpable plug is filling the neck—a plug as soft and repulsive as phlegm. The neck is locally frozen, as if by a dermatologist. The bottle is turned upright. The carbon dioxide in the champagne drives out the frozen plug, and the bottle is swiftly capped with a wired-down cork mushroom. Machines controlled by computers do most of the riddling now, but when the machines break down, as they do, riddlers are here to take over.



"*Grandpa's up there somewhere.*"

• •

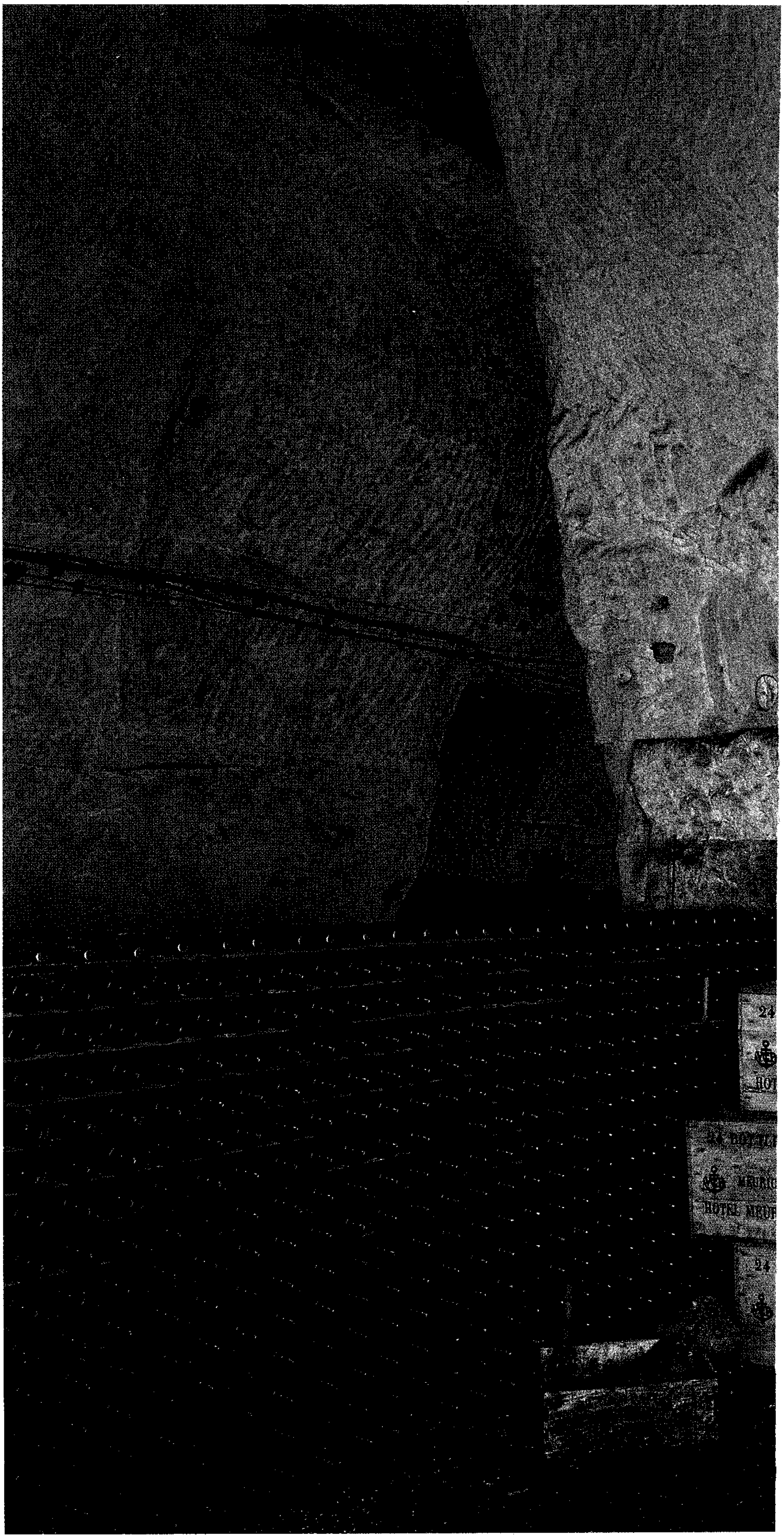
Moët & Chandon has about twenty-five hundred acres of its own grapes and buys a great many more from villages around the region. The company uses two skinless reds and a white, and generally begins its champagnes with still wines of three successive years. The top of the line is labelled Dom Pérignon. It is made only from Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, is nearly a hundred per cent from grands crus, and is aged seven years. This is not the Médoc. In your flute, what will matter is not a unique vineyard but the status of the various places where the grapes grew on the chalk.

In 1822, the Belgian stratigrapher J. J. d'Omalius d'Halloy, working for the French government, put a name on the chalk of Europe which would come to represent an ungainly share of geologic time. Collectively, d'Halloy called the English downlands and the white sea cliffs and the bottom of the Channel and Dry Champagne—and so forth—Le Terrain Crétacé. Chalky it surely was, and soon the word not only made the jump from adjective to adjectival noun but also from geologic system to geologic period—from rock to time. With the arguable exception of the Carboniferous, the Cretaceous is the only period in the forty-six hundred million years of the earth's history that was directly named for a rock.

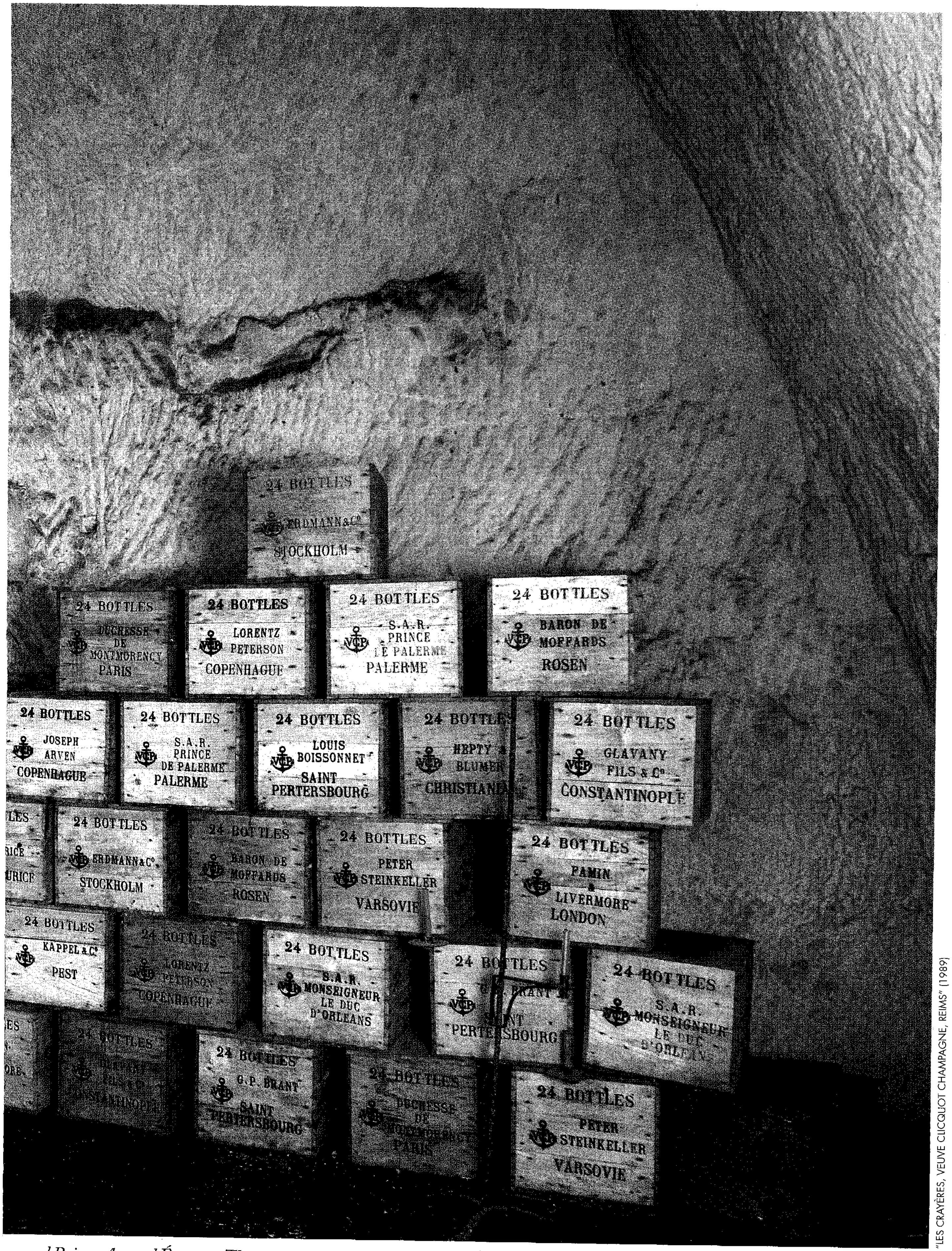
While nineteenth-century geologists were able to establish the relative ages of various formations by noting what lay over and under what, they had no way of measuring the amount of time the units represented. Radiometrics now suggest that the Jurassic Period, which precedes the Cretaceous and was named for a mountain range, ended about a hundred and forty-five million years ago. Then on came the Cretaceous, with its flying reptiles, its rudistid clams, its titanosaurs, dromaeosaurs, elasmosaurs, duck-billed and ostrich dinosaurs, and introductory flowering plants, not to mention Triceratops, Tyrannosaurus rex, and all the marine invertebrates that disappeared in the Cretaceous Extinction, sixty-five million years ago, a date better known to modern schoolchildren than 1492. In the Cretaceous was more time than there has been since the Cretaceous. The Paleocene, Eocene, Oligocene, Miocene, Pliocene, Pleistocene, and Holocene add up only to four-fifths of the eighty million years of the Cretaceous. The chalk it is named for developed during roughly half of Cretaceous time—temporally the more recent half, stratigraphically the upper half. The chalk is made of the calcareous remains of microscopic marine plants and animals that lived in the water column and sank after death—slower than riddled yeast—in epicontinental seas. The chalk accumulated at the rate of about one millimetre in a century, and the thickness got past three hundred metres in some thirty-five million years.

The beds that rise closest to the date of the extinction are known in French geology as Le Crétacé Supérieur, in England as the Upper Chalk. This is the chalk of the vineyards and Downs, the chalk of the Champagne cellars, and it wraps around the Paris Basin and down to the Touraine. But then it disappears as the country continues in older lithologies, in collisional juxtapositions of magmas and metamorphics, of Precambrian, Cambrian, Ordovician, and Devonian rocks. Oddly, though, in isolation, Le Crétacé Supérieur outcrops in Cognac. Five hundred beeline kilometres from Reims, the chalk of a couple of the uppermost Cretaceous stages is concentrated under vineyards east and southeast of town. The spirit that derives from these vineyards is labelled "Grande Champagne cognac." Next door, where the soil is a bit less favorable, the product is labelled "Petite Champagne cognac." There are many other cognacs, but none is superior, Cretaceously or otherwise, to the champagne cognacs.

In the nineteenth century, the long unwieldy geologic periods were subdivided into stages and ages—respectively of rock and time. Three of the four highest levels of the Cretaceous are the (successively younger) Coniacian, Santonian, and Campanian. These are universal in the scientific vocabulary, applying to whatever happens to be of identical age anywhere on the planet. Coniacian is a reference to Cognac. Santonian refers to the town of Saintes, fifteen miles up the road. Campanian,



Since the Roman times, hundreds of miles of tunnels have been carved deep in the French chalk


24 BOTTLES
ERDMANN & Co
STOCKHOLM
DUCHESSE DE MONTMORENCY PARIS
LORENTZ PETERSON COPENHAGUE
S.A.R. PRINCE DE PALERME PALERME
BARON DE MOFFARDS ROSEN
JOSEPH ARVEN COPENHAGUE
LOUIS BOISSONNET SAINT PERTERSBOURG
HEPTY & BLUMER CHRISTIANIA
GLAVANY FILS & Co CONSTANTINOPLE
PETER STEINKELLER VARSOVIE
PAMIN & LIVERMORE LONDON
KAPPEL & Co PEST
S.A.R. MONSEIGNEUR LE DUC D'ORLEANS
G.P. BRANT SAINT PETERSBOURG

around Reims, Ay, and Épernay. They store more than a billion bottles of champagne. Photograph by Robert Polidori.

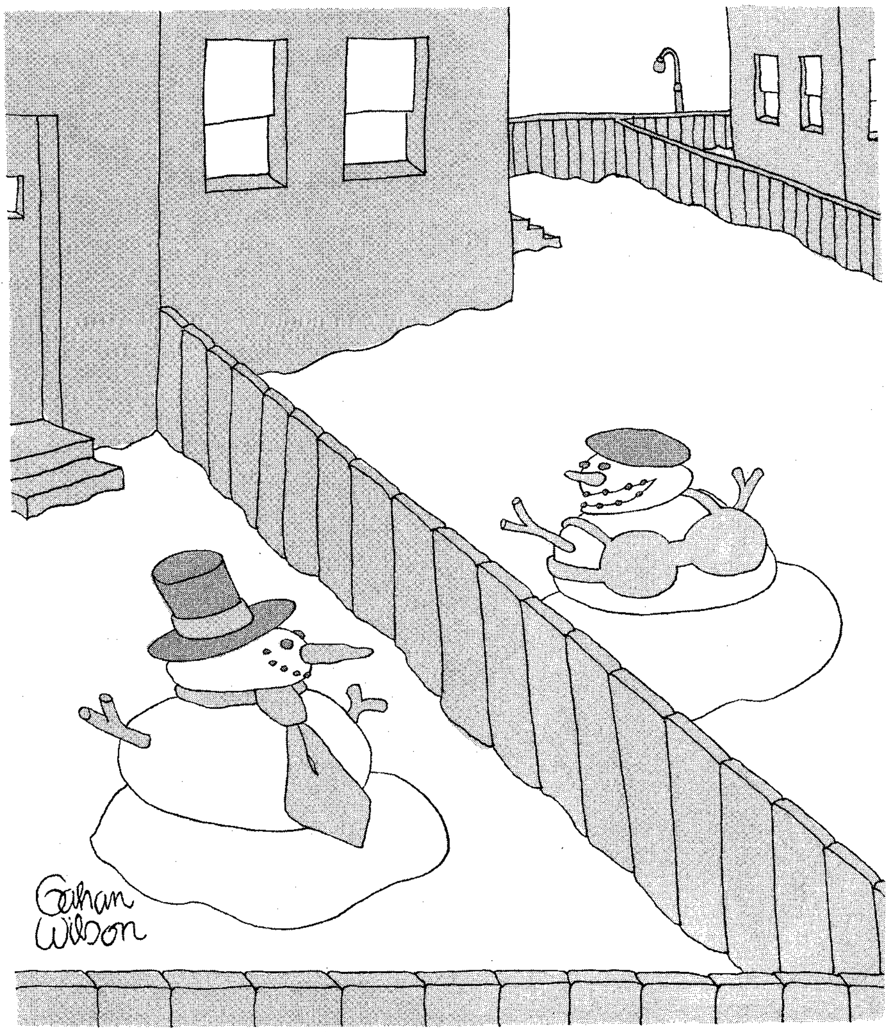
"LES CRAYÈRES, VEUVE CLICQUOT CHAMPAGNE, REIMS" (1989) of course, is a nod to Champagne. Imagine these names being tossed about at the Chinese Geological Survey. Cognac is on the Charente, which flows along a fault line that trends east-west. On the south side of the river are the Grande Champagne vineyards of the late Cretaceous. The north side is Jurassic and not in the conversation.

The youngest of all levels of Cretaceous chalk was identified by the stratigrapher André Dumont in 1849 and called Maastrichtian. The adjective refers to the Dutch town where, as it happens, the euro would come to be (in 1991) and the European Union would form. It is the provincial capital of Limburg, which hangs down eccentrically from the southeastern corner of the rest of the Netherlands. The river Meuse, which rises in France and flows six hundred miles to the North Sea, becomes the river Maas when it crosses into Holland. Maastricht was where the Romans forded the Maas. Much of its bedrock is Maastrichtian chalk.

On the Onze Lieve Vrouweplein, a square in the old core of Maastricht, is the frankly modern Hotel Derlon, which is evidently as unembarrassed to be looking out on ancient and medieval Europe through large rectangles of plate glass as it is justly proud of the Roman ruins in its basement. They were discovered in 1983 during the hotel's reconstruction, and they include massive foundation walls of quarried chalk and a water well surrounded by chalk blocks as much as two feet thick. Carefully excavated archeologically, these Roman artifacts are as well protected as they would be had they been carted off by the British Museum. Do not enter. Do not touch. Just sit down at a ruinside table and dine in this hallowed space, which the hotel calls Museumkelder Derlon. Maastricht has other Roman vestiges, and they also are made of quarried chalk. For many centuries, Maastricht was a walled city, and large segments of its sixteen-foot chalk walls still stand. Maastricht remains intimate, self-contained, vintage European—a city of chalk basilicas and chalk churches, one of which is eleven centuries old. Where was all that chalk quarried? Surely not under the city. Have you been to the *grotten* in Sint Pietersberg, just five miles up the river? No? Party of five? Take one of the *bootsfahrten*.

The boat is long and mahoganied with waiters and a bar, and casts off from the left bank above the Sint Servaasbrug, the oldest bridge in the Netherlands. At this same site was a Roman bridge, which lasted about a thousand years and fell into the river in the twelve-seventies. Sint Servaasbrug, with seven piers, dates from 1280. The boat swings under it, and up the center of a long reach through the city, the right bank glassy and corporate, the left bank's skyline tiled, turreted, and ecclesiastical. The left bank is to our right; the right bank is to our left. Such river runes are not beyond the grasp of Livia Svenvold McPhee, who is six and quick to learn, but they're off the scale for her two-year-old brother, Jasper, and, dare I say it, their father and mother, Mark Svenvold and Martha McPhee. The breeze is cool on the open deck, and the boat is soon running past saturated fields that resemble the fens of Cambridgeshire which are also on the chalk. Jet Skis circle the boat, and weave Olympic rings around slow-moving barges full of crushed cars. Other barges, carrying ores and grains, are everywhere on the river, as are private cabin boats, nosing around the barges like pretentious tugs.

A steep but modest hill comes into view off the left bank: literally, on Dutch maps, a mountain—Sint Pietersberg. What the berg is made of is not a great mystery in this province. E.N.C.I.—Eerste Nederlandse Cement Industrie—is carved into its base, where the Comité d'Étude du Maastrichtian confirmed this place as the type locality of the final stage of the Cretaceous. We have come to see an operation that is a good deal older than E.N.C.I., though, and we climb the hill past and above E.N.C.I. until we see what could easily be mistaken for the en-



"Well, hello there yourself!"

trance to the Carlsbad Caverns, or to Luray Caverns, or to Mammoth Cave. With the difference that this excavation is absolutely unnatural. The word *grotten* is used for its subterranean galleries—the Grotten Sint Pietersberg—but this is not a cave, or a series of caves. It's a mine. Specifically, it's a chalk quarry—an intermittent source of building stone across a scale of time approaching twenty-one hundred years. The *grotten* actually are much like the tunnels of Moët & Chandon, which—heaven help us—are called caves but also are not caves.

For well casings, foundations, fortifications, and bathhouses, among other things, the Romans were the first to go into the mountain, and they did so for several hundred years, giving up the quarry in the fourth century. Its rock is a less than pure-white chalk, tanned by enough clay to be called a marl. In a group, you follow a guide with two electric lanterns, suspended from bails like railroad lanterns. He hands one to the last guidee in line, then leads the way into darkness, cracking jokes in English. His name is Leon Frissen. He is short, stocky, balding, and friendly. You follow him down and down through a gallery system, and if you've ever been in a salt mine the place reminds you of a salt mine. The constant temperature is ten degrees Celsius and you shiver. Now you are about thirty-five metres below the surface. The gallery walls are seven metres high. The lantern light is the only light. It throws awkward, lurching shadows. Seeing me struggle to write notes, Frissen takes a flashlight out of his pocket and gives it to me. Rounding a corner, we look down a straight corridor into a mournful and infinite gloom. Frissen says the corridor goes on for several kilometres before the next bend. He says there are three hundred and fifty kilometres of galleries in and beyond the mountain, hewn, by *blokbrekers*, with three tools: chisel, hammer, and saw. The quarrying resumed in the thirteenth century and continued until 1926.

Allied pilots, shot down during the Second World War, were taken into the tunnels and led underground to Resistance forces in nearby Belgium. The route was known as the Pilots Line. On tunnel walls, it was blazed by drawings of doves. In the Sint Pietersberg galleries, you see doves not only on the walls but also on the thick and natural pillars of chalk left standing to prevent the collapse of the mine. From 1942 to 1945, Dutch museums hid more than seven hundred works of art inside the mountain, including Vermeer's "The Little Street" and Rembrandt's "The Night Watch," a huge canvas (fifteen square metres) that spent the rest of the war rolled up as a stalagmite. After surface telephone lines were destroyed by German bombs, a line was run through the *grotten* keeping connections open with Belgium and northern France. Maastrichtians and other people of the province hid in the mountain, especially while battle raged through Limburg. You see a niche chapel far underground, and Stations of the Cross. There was a bakery, a hospital, and three churches, two of them Roman Catholic. Twelve thousand people were inside the mountain in late summer, 1944. Maastricht was freed by Allied troops, mostly American, on the fourteenth of September. A few kilometres east of the mountain, in the Netherlands American Cemetery, eighty-three hundred soldiers are buried in the chalk.

Graffiti in the tunnels in the mountain—drawings, advertisements, people's names—can be arranged as a sort of timescale of the ages of quarrying, just as the scale of the ages of the Cretaceous rise through Berriasian, Valanginian, Hauterivian, Barremian, Aptian, Albian, Cenomanian, Turonian, Coniacian, Santonian, Campanian, and Maastrichtian time.

There are names on the walls from 1551.

Among swinging shadows in lantern light, the name of Don Ferdinand Álvarez de Toledo, Duke of Alba, appears with the date 1570. (His headquarters were on the mountain. Spanish troops massacred thousands of Maastrichtians on a single day in 1579.)

Someone called Olivier left his name in the *grotten* in 1660.

As did Ianno in 1681, with a word about the quality of his oil. (Ianno was a merchant. To the *blokbrekers*, he sold linseed oil for their lamps.)

Rosa de Horlon was here, her name on the wall: 14 *mei* 1781.

Napoleon Bonaparte 1803.

Martha: "Why was Napoleon here?"

Guide: "Why are you here?"

Martha considers this an inadequate answer.

Too busy scribbling, I keep my question to myself: If Napoleon knew what was inside the mountain, and other tourists toured the quarry in the nineteenth century, why were the Nazis unaware of the Maastrichtian refuge and the Pilots Line? (According to Rik Valkenburg's "Ondergronds Verzet: Illegale Transporten door de Grotten van de Sint Pietersberg-Maastricht in 1940-1944," Maastrichtians convinced the Germans that it had become physically impossible to move people or goods to Belgium through the mountain. They took the head of the local Gestapo on a selective tour of the *grotten* and drove home the point. German soldiers did occasionally patrol parts of the vast subterranean maze, but the Resistance knew their routes and schedules. Travellers on the Pilots Line shrank back into lightless caverns.)

There are names on the walls from 1854.

From the eighteen-seventies, there's an ad for Bols gin.

A remarkably detailed, beautifully drawn, anonymous charcoal landscape is dated 1904.

Ferocious mosasaur, sketched on a tunnel wall in 1907—the big-headed, long-toothed, long-bodied predatory reptile that lived in the Cretaceous ocean and its epicontinental seas. "Mosasaur," misleadingly, means reptile of the river Maas—actually a marine creature, not riverine, discovered inside Sint Pietersberg in the eighteenth century, fifty years before the earliest description of dinosaurs. Mosasaurs were as much as fifty feet long, swimming like snakes toward the Cretaceous Extinction.

On the chalk near the mosasaur: a 1948 drawing of the Dutch royal family, the present queen, Beatrix, as a princess ten years old.

Returning to sunlight, we start to descend the hill, and Livia has a question for her mother.

Livia: "Why was granddaddy writing all those notes?"

Martha: "Ask him."

Livia: "Granddaddy, why were you writing all those notes?"

Scandinavian blond, beautiful beyond reason, as swift of mind as she is beautiful, etc., etc., Livia is nonetheless not yet in first grade. She will not know from Maastrichtian time. In explanatory dialogue with her, who could use a term like Cretaceous Extinction, let alone trace the Upper Chalk to the end of Cretaceous time?

Granddaddy: "Well, Livia, let's see. You've heard of dinosaurs, right?"

Livia (evenly): "Yes."

Granddaddy: "They got bigger and bigger, and there came a time when they all disappeared from the earth. Right?"

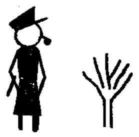
Livia: "Yes."

Granddaddy: "Have you ever wondered what killed them?"

Livia: "Asteroid, or volcano."

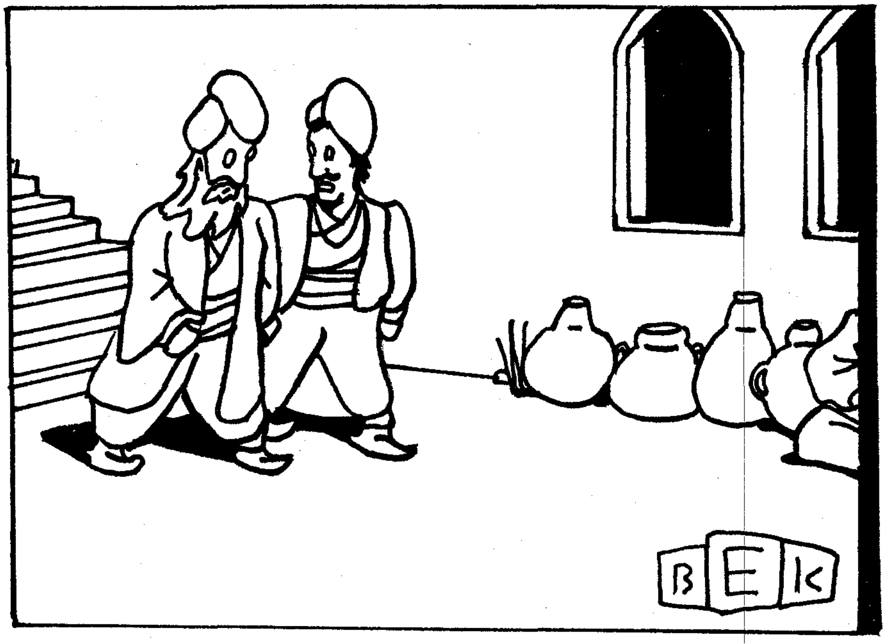
As we go down the mountain, I keep looking at her in wonder, yes, but in fading disbelief. Her reply to my question actually adds up to something more than a good story to tell about a beloved six-year-old granddaughter. It is also an index to conventional wisdom, and to the speed of its development. The hypothesis that a big asteroid—a so-called bolide, or Apollo object—hit the earth sixty-five million years ago and sent up enough particulate matter to darken the atmosphere and cut off the food chain was published in 1980. It was surprising news. The physicist Freeman Dyson referred to it at the time as "the most interesting piece of science" he had read in ten years. Now a freshly turned-out kindergarten graduate lists it first among the causes of the death of the dinosaurs. And so, I think, would a majority of people on the planet who are aware, to whatever extent, of the Cretaceous Extinction. What was unknown not many years ago is conventional wisdom now. The 1980 paper, in *Science,* reported the research and conclusions of Walter Alvarez, a geologist, and his father, Luis, who won the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1968. Their idea stemmed from the globally widespread presence at the Cretaceous-Tertiary stratigraphic boundary of certain platinum-group metals rare on the earth but common in meteorites and other extraterrestrial objects. The crater of a very large asteroid was later identified in and around northern Yucatán, its impact of appropriate age. Walter Alvarez told the story in a lively and well-received book called "T. rex and the Crater of Doom." By now, the discovery has become so well established that it has made its way down through the grades and even into preschool.

Not everyone has become a subscriber, though—not even the population of every West Side kindergarten, as one could see in Livia's response, "Asteroid, or volcano." I wish she had said "volcanism," but what can I do? She isn't seven yet. Before 1980, a number of other researchers matched the Cretaceous Extinction to the vast outpouring of flood basalts that solidified as the Deccan Traps. From countless fissures, at least forty-five hundred trillion tons of incandescent lava poured out across more than two hundred thousand square miles of what is now western India. Those eruptions—so the "volcano" hypothesis goes—altered the entire atmosphere and broke the food chain, with the result that some two-thirds of all species on earth perished, a fact that is legible in the fossil record. Flood basalts of such magnitude occur when geophysical hot spots first manifest themselves on the earth's surface. The heat is escaping from regions in or near the earth's core, and it rises through the mantle in a thermal plume that melts a vast quantity of mantle and crust and drives it out at the top. A hot spot lasts about a hundred million years. While a tectonic plate—a thin shell in this context—slides over the hot spot, it is repeatedly penetrated by the plume, like a piece of cloth by the needle of a sewing machine. Over time, many hot spots have come and gone, leaving vestiges like Bermuda and the Bahama Platform. The Musician Seamounts, in the North Pacific Ocean, are the track of a dead hot spot. About twenty major ones are active in the modern world, such as Hawaii, Iceland, Mt. Cameroon, Tahiti, Madeira, and Yellowstone, which began in Oregon and Washington as the Columbia River flood basalts and has stitched an east-moving track while the North American Plate, moving west, has slid over its penetrating plume. "Traps" is a term that derives from a Swedish word that means stair steps. It describes the appearance—on the Malabar coast, in the Columbia Gorge, etc.—of successive lava flows that harden as basalt.



The Cretaceous Extinction ranks second to the Permian Extinction—at the end of the Paleozoic Era, about two hundred and fifty-one million years before the present—in which ninety-nine per cent of all animals on the earth, of every size, from large to microscopic, were killed. At the Paleozoic-Mesozoic stratigraphic boundary, there is no known deposit of extraterrestrial platinum-group metals, nor is there any other form of evidence of an asteroid impact. Flood basalts, though, occurred right then, covering roughly a million square miles of Siberia to depths exceeding twelve thousand feet. In the mid-nineteen-eighties, the geophysicist W. Jason Morgan, whose work on geophysical hot spots has been regarded by some as an even larger contribution to the advancement of science than his revelation, in the nineteen-sixties, of the basic geometries of plate tectonics, reacted to the asteroid hypothesis by noting that a skein of mass extinctions (including the Cretaceous and Permian Extinctions) coincide with the initiation of hot spots. Flood basalts in the Central Atlantic, for example, mark the end of Triassic time.

Meanwhile, not a few paleontologists interpret the fossil record in a light that deëmphasizes both the Yucatán catastrophe and, to a lesser extent, the flood basalts. The paleontologists take such things into full account, but what they assemble from the evidence in the rock is a laminated story, far less clear and far more complex. In a 2005 paper in the *Australian Journal of Earth Sciences*, the Princeton paleontologist Gerta Keller mentions depletions of ocean oxygen, global warming, and pronounced rises of sea level among the developments that have prefigured mass extinctions, whether volcanism and asteroidal impact were or were not involved. In a paper published in 2001 in *Planetary and Space Science*, Keller says of the Yucatán asteroid, "This theory unquestionably has great sex appeal. The largest and most fascinating creatures that ever roamed the Earth were wiped out in a single day in a ball of fire caused by a meteorite impact that leaves behind the crater of doom. . . . The existence of an impact crater alone, however, neither proves nor explains the demise of the dinosaurs, or the mass extinction of any other groups." In the words of Monica Wojcik, one of Keller's undergraduate students, "Essentially she sees the end-Cretaceous as what she calls 'the bad-luck theory'—a bunch of natural events piling up at once." Add to the equation continental drift, atmospheric carbon dioxide, and glaciation, among other things. Climate has been severely altered as continents have changed position, not only in latitude but also with respect to one another. In the late Ordovician, for example, as three ancestral continents coalesced on their way to becoming the northern part of Pangaea, there was about ten times as much atmospheric carbon dioxide as there is today, large parts of the landmass were thickly covered with ice, and the period ended with a two-phase mass extinction that is thought by some paleontologists to have been even deadlier than the Cretaceous Extinction. "In this case," Keller says, "all fingers point toward glaciation" as the leading cause. "Glaciation causes turnover. Cool water brings toxic things up from black shale." The Ordovician ocean became anoxic. When the dying occurred, there were no bolides peppering the earth and no fresh flood basalts anywhere.



"How much do you tip your genie?"

• •

It's enough to ruffle conventional wisdom, unsettling the jury as to who killed whom, and what killed what. While the earth moves on toward the first mass extinction caused by a living species, debates about earlier ones are really unresolved.

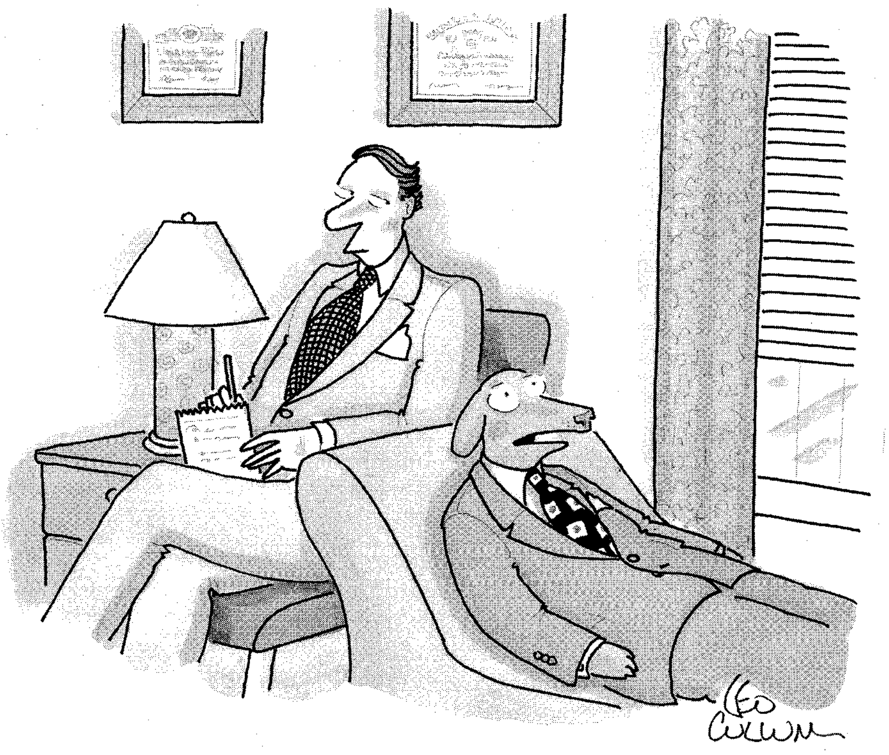
Loose on the Downs with Harry: The top leadership of MI5 was an inverted T—one over one over five. Doyne-Ditmas was among the five. And now he's twice retired and at large atop the chalk cliffs, coolly walking the fenceless lip in rain driven by forty-mile winds, his white hair streaming. When he was nineteen, in Massachusetts, he was Lord Mountararat in "Iolanthe." Now he is Hal Doyne-Lear on the chalky bourn—Gloucester with eyes. He says it is "raining stair rods." What a peculiar expression, methinks. Stair rods hold carpets to stairs, while dogs and cats gauge rain. These are the white cliffs of Sussex—Cuckmere Haven to Beachy Head—the whitest in the Cretaceous Terrain, fairly glaring in the sun when there's a sun. Eroded in a rhythm of reëntrants and promontories, they call to mind a row of clerestory windows. Almost straight down them—hundreds of feet—are waves. Hal holds his camera over the edge. After MI5 and elsewhere in government, he took the name Harry and halved his professional surname to become Harry Ditmas. Behind us, the view north is of a vast deep swale and then the rising hills, cattle far up there like chocolate bits. Looking for something as original as the stair rods, I ask Harry what sorts of words the English choose to describe their remarkable downlands. He says, "'Rolling' comes along rather quickly." To the east is Beachy Head, the highest, giddiest chalk cliff in Britain, where the Upper Chalk emerges from the English Channel to become the South Downs. "God is always greater than all of our troubles," says a small plaque a few yards from the edge. And a sign: "The Samaritans—Always There, Day or Night, 735555 or 08457 909090."

Chalk is calcium carbonate. Limestone is calcium carbonate. Why these cliffs are chalk and not limestone is a matter of ocean chemistry, of whether the mineral vestiges of planktonic life, settling on the seafloor as oozes and muds, needed to recrystallize as limestone or could indurate in their original texture. Pure calcium carbonate—CaCO$_3$—can vary in mineral structure. The word for such differing forms is "polymorph." Diamonds and graphite, both of which are pure carbon, are the world's most renowned polymorphs. Aragonite and calcite, mineral forms of CaCO$_3$, were the first polymorphs described in the history of chemistry. Aragonite is unstable and needs to recrystallize as limestone, while pure calcite is content to be chalk. In Phanerozoic time—a term that embraces the five hundred and forty-four million years before the present—the ocean has alternately been a calcite ocean and an aragonite ocean, changing three times. It was a calcite ocean when the white cliffs formed. It's an aragonite ocean now. Limestone, slowly, is soluble in water (those caverns and caves), but it is also hard and impermeable (the Empire State Building). Chalk is soft and porous. The Chunnel goes through chalk. Le Souterrain Crétacé. When the Chunnel opened, in 1994, the Department of Transport's director and coördinator of transport security—responsible for the security of everything that rolled, flew, or floated in the United Kingdom—was Harry.

His full actual name is Harold Granville Terence Payne Doyne-Ditmas.

Whatever he is called, I have a question for him: how fast are these cliffs eroding? Alone one morning on the Undercliff Coastal Walk, near Ovingdean on the way to Rottingdean, I picked up a hunk of chalk the size of a rugby ball that had just fallen from above, its fresh broken facets pearl-white. Chalk rains on the pavement of the Undercliff Coastal Walk, and breaks down underfoot, turning into pewter mud (lime ooze) and recapitulating its history. Signs everywhere: "Do not use the Undercliff in bad weather. The sea and sea defences can be hazardous. Falls of chalk and flint can occur without warning." "Keep off the groynes." Doyne-Ditmas reminds me that erosion rates are not among his preoccupations. He answers my question empirically, though, driving to the water's edge at Birling Gap and stopping before a coast-guard barracks that, like a motel, is a long narrow terrace, a set of attached "cottages." The building's axis, running north-south, is ninety degrees to the line of the beach, which, for miles on either side, is also the line of the cliffs. Dating from the nineteenth century, the coast-guard barracks were built symmetrically, their beachward and landward arms meeting in a central unit of somewhat different proportion. But one arm now is a good bit shorter than the other. The once central unit is eccentric. The end that reaches toward the sea has been, in effect, lopped off by the sea. In a chalk boulder field near the building, some of the fallen boulders are ten feet in diameter. A lighthouse up the cliff was recently moved back seventeen metres, to keep it from falling with the chalk. The cliffs of Sussex are being eroded, we learn, at an average rate of about thirty-five centimetres a year. Thus, in forty thousand years the Downs will be down to the elevation of the Weald, and in a couple of hundred thousand more the cliffs now at Dover will be standing in London or Gravesend or Chalk. Sounds slow, but geomorphologically that is fast. Nowhere near as fast, however, as the excavation of the English Channel. The two most relevant masses of ice that covered northwestern Europe in late Pleistocene time were the Fennoscandian Ice Sheet and the British Ice Sheet. The latter, a mile thick, covered most of Ireland, all of Scotland, all of Wales, and England south to a line more or less between Cambridge and Oxford. With ice on North America and so much of Europe, sea level was some four hundred feet lower than it is at present. The Thames Valley was not glaciated, and the Thames flowed out into a larger river, known in geology as the Channel River, which ran between England and France through dry land bedrocked with chalk. When the ice melted, the meltwaters turned the Thames into a hydroplow and the Channel River into a cold Amazon, fed also by the Rhine, the Maas, the Somme, and the Seine, and from Scandinavia as well. This was the greatest river system that has ever drained Europe, and without much resistance it gouged out the English Channel and drove back to the two sides the chalk cliffs of France and England. Erosion rated, Harry pauses at a blackthorn to collect a pocketful of sloes for his next batch of sloe gin. Jackdaws, peregrines, kittiwakes, and kestrels are overhead. Sloes are like hard blue grapes.

In Hal's early years in the Box, he sat for a time at a desk next to David Cornwell, an exact contemporary who left the service to extend his career as John le Carré. Hal served abroad at times—in Kuala Lumpur, for example, and in Moscow, where his cover job at the British Embassy was "line manager of a hundred local staff, all, presumably at least, co-opted workers of the K.G.B." As he went to bed in Moscow each night, he imagined that if he were to speak aloud in a dream the K.G.B. would be recording what he said. He served in Belfast in the nineteen-eighties. A night came when he and his wife, Julia, "had to do a rapid moonlight flit," leaving their house "permanently and forever," after it was realized that his cover was blown. In Eastbourne, under Beachy Head, he shows me the prep school from which he was evacuated during the Second World War. Like the Normans at Hastings, which is ten miles from Eastbourne, the Wehrmacht intended to invade this coastline. Loose on the Downs, I keep thinking of those cattle nearly infinitesimal far up the rolling grasslands, and remembering that in his prime Harry could have picked one off. While the rest of us were playing rugger, squash, tennis, or basketball, Harry was firing rifles at extremely distant targets. His public school, Uppingham, had been by his literal description "far and away the most successful shooting school." He had competed in Britain



"Scratch my head, would you?"

and Canada as one of the Cambridge VIII, and after Cambridge he went global on British national teams. I went out to a range with him once in those years, near Woking, in Surrey, on the chalk of the North Downs. We looked far across the coalescing hills at targets smaller than cows. Gratuitously, Hal observed that his sport was not played with a moving ball you could dribble. As he describes it now, success or failure depended on "ability to judge the wind, and not being nervous; being able to concentrate; not to panic when the pressure is on." Golf with gunpowder. The bull's-eye was twenty-four inches wide. "You might have to allow for twenty-five feet of drift at a thousand yards. We used ordinary Army-issue .303 rifles, essentially unimproved." On a wall at his home in Brighton are two antique nineteenth-century rifles—one from each side at Tel-el-Kebir. His grandfather Edward Ditmas brought them home.

Close up, the chalk cliffs appear to be studded, almost like formal shirts, with uniform black dots. They line up in horizontal rows. Spaces are even from dot to dot and also between rows, which are about a metre apart. The impression given is of bedding planes, but those horizontal rows are not bedding planes. Sponge spicules and other forms of organic silicon were among the impurities in the original chalk deposit. Within a given and consistent cubic dimension of chalk, the contained silicon dioxide will gather itself until it forms a very dense silicon-dioxide nodule, which is also known as cryptocrystalline quartz. Like chert, agate, jasper, and chalcedony, flint is cryptocrystalline quartz. Those black dots in the chalk cliffs are chunks of flint. The shingle beaches below the white cliffs consist almost entirely of flint cobbles the size of ostrich eggs. If you stand next to a chalk cliff and lift your head, you look up a wall spiky with projecting flints. When they fall, they sometimes break. A cracked-open surface, opaque and light to dark gray, is smooth and shines like glass. The old structures of half of Sussex, not to mention Surrey, seem to be made of flint—flint churches, flint terraces, flint houses reinforced with bricks at the corners, flint retaining walls bordering sunken lanes. Doyne-Ditmas seems especially fond of the big flint prison in Lewes, its flints, black and gray, "giving it a sort of piebald aspect." In some flint construction, the nodules were left whole. More often, they were hammered open—cracked like walnuts—so that their flat glassy surfaces would shine. The process is known as knapping and the results are knapped flints. Some flints were knapped so painstakingly that their outer surfaces were not only flat but also rectangular. In building walls they seem to be obsidian bricks.

Parting glimpses of the chalk:

In Downe, on the North Downs, in Charles Darwin's Down House, is a portrait in chalk of Darwin's wife, Emma. A billiard table is on display, no lack of chalk for the cues. Darwin did all his great work in this place, where he lived after the Beagle for the rest of his life. He and Emma had ten children. Darwin played a lot of billiards, possibly to get away from the children but certainly, as he wrote in a letter, because "it does me a deal of good, and drives the horrid species out of my head." His garden walls are panels of stratified flint. If you drive here from, say, the north side of the Thames, you move very slowly from stoplight to stoplight through the heavy density of South London, scarcely a patch of green, and then, suddenly, you're in Darwin's Downe, on swelling land among pony carts and open fields, horses, jodhpurred women perched in saddles, knapped flints like oyster shells up the wall of a country teahouse called Evolution 1.

Flints from English chalk ignited the powder that answered the shot heard round the world.

Flints from English chalk ignited the muskets that broke the Scottish clans.

Chalk is the bedrock of Salisbury Plain, so the stones of Stonehenge came from as far away as Wales.

Romans on the English chalk built roadbeds of flint cobbles and covered them with compacted gravel and slag.

One Roman road ran close by the White Horse of Uffington, if the white horse was—as it is claimed to be—already there. Scraped into the chalk of a steep hill in the Berkshire Downs, the white horse is three hundred and seventy-four feet long.

The Long Man of Wilmington, scraped into the chalk of the South Downs escarpment—his date of origin unknown—is two hundred and thirty-five feet tall.

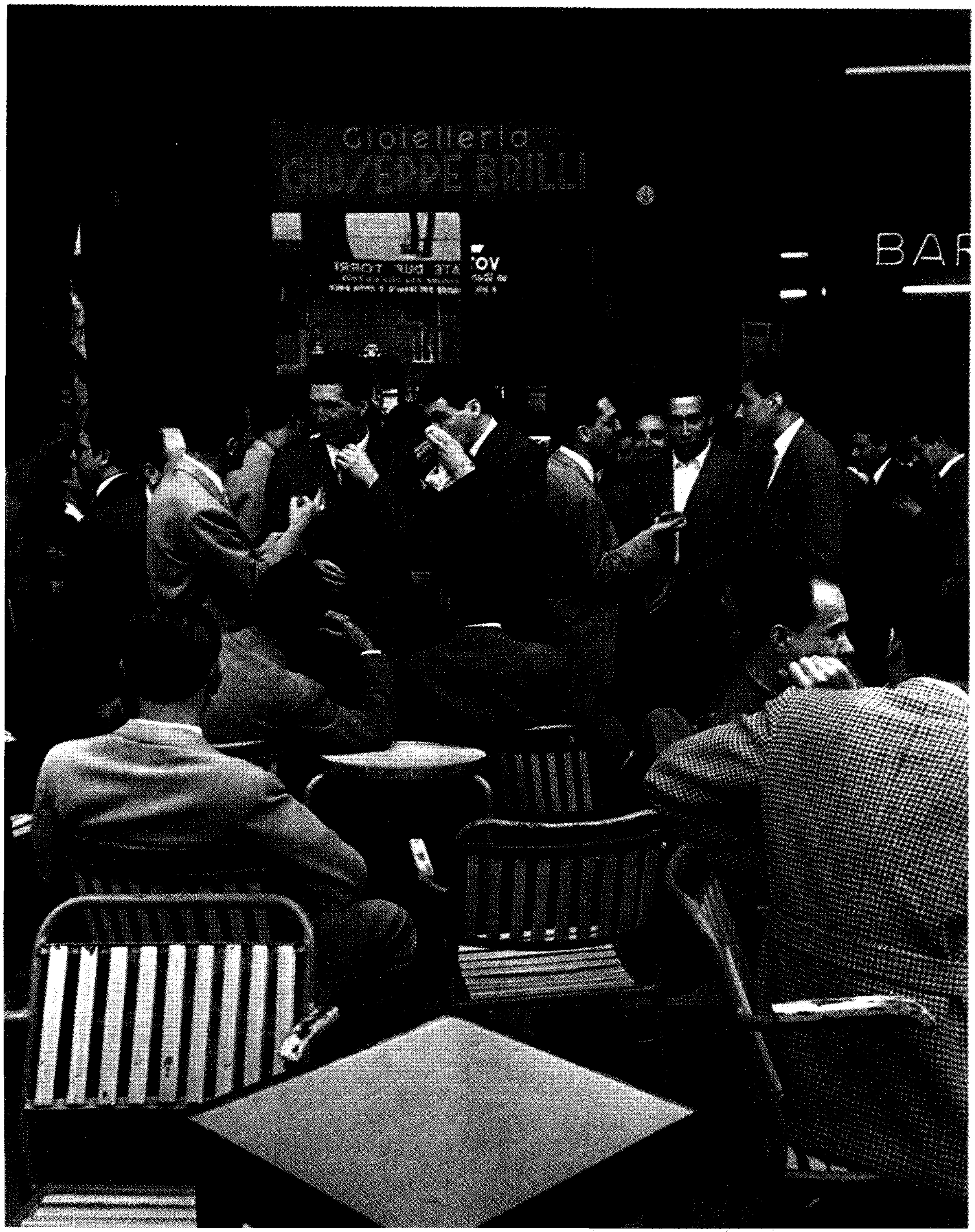
The Cerne Abbas Giant, on a bald hill in Dorset, is a chalk figure a hundred and eighty feet tall, also known as the Rude Man. His penis is erect and thirty feet long. His testicles are ten feet wide. English couples ascend the hill, lie down on the giant, and couple. Women who wish to conceive spend a night alone on the penis.

The storied streams of Hampshire run in their fecundity over Upper Cretaceous chalk. In Newton Stacey, where the Dever meets the Test, you walk down to the confluence as if circling a room from one Constable landscape to the next—passing through hedgerowed fields and under horse chestnuts, opening and shutting gates, "BEWARE THE BULL." Coot are swimming on the River Test, two swans and four cygnets on the Dever. Over the junction pool, an ash ripe with ash keys spreads its canopy across the two rivers. They are surprisingly narrow and intimate, not much more than brooks—the Test, the mother stream, scarcely three feet deep and thirty wide. Its bank, squared off and shored with planking, is level and closely mowed so that anglers can walk beside the water unimpeded, dry shod, with no thought of stepping in. It just isn't done, stepping in. The air is full of damselflies, midges, mayflies, swifts, and swallows, the sandy chalky bottom thick with cress and water crowfoot. The angler is wise to creep along the footpath, or, at least, to tiptoe. One unwary step and a two-pound brown explodes from cover under the lip of the bank and vanishes upstream. You sit down on a bench and think it over. Arctic grayling, which have even higher standards of water quality than trout do, share this sacred water, as does *Esox lucius*—the piscivorous Devil, the savage Fiend, the pike—known to grow as large as one stone three consuming trout. The underwater water crowfoot grows so fast that the waterkeeper mows it like the grass. In his fish garden, beside the Dever, the waterkeeper's shed roofs are thatched, a bull trout is memorialized that was "killed August 1934," and drying at the tops of posts are the heads of four huge pike. ♦

FICTION

SEE THE OTHER SIDE

BY TATYANA TOLSTAYA


Gioielleria
GIUSEPPE BRILLI
BAR

A hot day in May in Ravenna, the small Italian city where Dante is buried. Once upon a time—right at the start of the fifth century A.D.—the Emperor Honorius transferred the capital of the Western Roman Empire to this city. There was a port here then, but the sea has since receded, and in its place are swamps, roses, dust, and vineyards. Ravenna is famous for its mosaics; hordes of tourists move from one church to another, craning their necks to glimpse the dim lustre of tiny multicolored smalti high up under dusky vaults. It is possible to make out something in those vaults, but not very much. The glossy postcards, though terribly bright, flat, and cheap-looking, will give you a better view.

I'm suffocating and hot. I'm depressed. My father died, and I loved him so much! Once, long, long ago, almost forty years back, he passed through Ravenna and sent me a postcard of one of these famous mosaics. On the back—in pencil, for some reason; he must have been in a hurry—he wrote, "Sweetheart! I have never seen anything so sublime (see the other side) in my life! Makes you want to cry! Oh, if only you were here! Your Father!"

Each sentence ends with a silly exclamation point—he was young, he was cheerful, maybe he'd had a glass of wine. I can see him with his felt hat cocked in the manner of the late fifties, a cigarette between his white teeth—which were still his own then—beads of sweat on his forehead. Tall, slim, handsome: his eyes shine happily behind the glass circles of his spectacles. . . . The postcard—which he dropped in a mailbox, lightheartedly entrusting it to two unreliable postal services, the Italian and the Russian—depicts Heaven: the Lord sits amid a blindingly green paradise of eternal spring, white sheep grazing all around. Those two unreliable postal services had bent the corners of the postcard, but it didn't matter—the message was received and everything could be seen.

If Heaven exists, then my father is there now. Where else would he be? The only thing is, he died—he died and he doesn't write me postcards with exclamation points anymore; he no longer sends tidings from all parts of the globe: *I'm here, I love you. Do you love me? Do you share my pleasure and joy? Do you see the beauty that I see? Greetings! Here's a postcard! Here's a cheap, glossy photograph—I was here! It's wonderful! Oh, if only you could be here, too!*

He travelled all over the world, and he liked the world. Now, as much as I can, I follow in his footsteps. I go to the same towns and try to see them through his eyes, try to imagine him young, turning that corner, climbing those steps, leaning on the railing of the embankment with a cigarette between his teeth.

This time I'm in Ravenna, a stuffy, exhausting place, like all tourist destinations where crowds fill narrow streets. It's a dead, hollow, hot town, with no place to sit down. The tomb of Dante, exiled from his native Florence. The tomb of Theodorich. The mausoleum of Galla Placidia, sister of Flavius Honorius, the very man who made Ravenna the capital of the Western Empire. Fifteen centuries passed. Everything changed. Dust gathered; the mosaics crumbled. What was once important is now unimportant; what once excited has vanished in the sands. The sea itself has receded, and where merry green waves once splashed there are wastelands, vineyards, silence. Forty years—a whole lifetime—ago, my father strolled and laughed here; his myopic eyes squinted; he sat at a sidewalk table, drank red wine, and tore off bites of pizza with his own, strong teeth. The dark-blue night fell. And on a postcard balanced on the edge of the table, in pencil, he scribbled a few hurried words to me, scattering exclamation points and expressing his delight and his love for the world.

The overcast sky is stifling. It's hot, but the sun can't be seen. Dust is everywhere. Land that was once at the bottom of the sea now lies around the town in wide, fertile fields; where crabs once crawled, donkeys pick their way; in place of seaweed, roses grow. Everything has gone to seed. Along the once splendid streets of the capital of the Western world, disappointed American tourists in pink sweatshirts wander, unhappy that the travel agency has tricked them yet again: everything in Europe is so dinky, so small, so old! Fifteen centuries. Dante's grave. The tomb of Galla Placidia. My father's grave. Some sort of naïve green paradise on a crumpled postcard.

What was it that so amazed him here? I find the right church, I look up—yes, there's something green there, high up under the vault. White sheep on a green meadow. The usual dim light. The discordant hum of tourists below. Their fingers point. They look for explanations in their guidebooks: such-and-such a century, such-and-such a style. Everything is the same everywhere, always. You can hardly see.

In every Italian church there's a box on the wall for donations; and, for those who are interested, these boxes often provide an additional service. If you put in three hundred lira—twenty-five cents—for a brief moment spotlights are turned on near the ceiling, bathing the stones of the mosaic in fresh white light. The colors brighten. You can see details. The crowd gets excited; its hum grows louder. Only twenty-five cents. You've already come so far; you've paid for the plane ticket, for the train, the hotel, the pizza, the cold drinks, the coffee. How can you now begrudge a few extra cents? But many do. They're annoyed; they weren't forewarned. They want to see Heaven for free. They wait around for some other generous, impatient person to deposit a coin in the slot of that swindling Italian apparatus—all Italians are swindlers, isn't that right? Then the spotlights flare, and for a moment, too short for the human eye to adjust, paradise is greener, the sheep more innocent, the Lord—kinder. . . . And then the lights go off, and the din of the tourists turns from a momentary grumble of protest to a greedy growl to whispered disappointment. Once again, everything is immersed in gloom.

I wander from church to church along with the crowd. I listen to its muffled, multilingual murmur, like the rush of the sea; a slow human whirlpool spins me around, and tired, empty faces flash by—as empty as my own; eyeglasses glint; the pages of guidebooks rustle. I squeeze through the narrow doors of churches, push past my neighbors, trying, like everyone else, to get a better view, trying not to become irritated. After all, I think, if Heaven does exist it's likely that I'll enter it with just such a flock of sheep, of people—old, not all that smart, a bit greedy. Because if Heaven isn't for people like us, then who is it for, I'd like to know? Are there really so many others—

DAVID SEYMOUR [1951] / MAGNUM PHOTOS

special people, people who are noticeably better than us ordinary, statistically average souls? No, there aren't, so in all likelihood I will have to plod across those green meadows with a herd of American tourists, disgruntled that everything is so ancient and small. And, if that is the case, then Heaven must be awful and boring—which, by definition, seems wrong. Everything in Heaven should be utterly sublime.

"I have never seen anything so sublime (see the other side) in my life!" my father wrote. See the other side. An ordinary paradise. What did he see that I don't see?

I squeeze into a small building, of which the early-twentieth-century Russian traveller Pavel Muratov wrote in his famous book "Images of Italy":

> The blue of the ceiling of the mausoleum of Galla Placidia is unusually dark and deep—almost inscrutably so. Depending on the light penetrating through the small windows, it will shimmer, in a wonderful and unexpectedly marvellous manner, with a greenish, lilac, or crimson hue. It is against this background that the famous depiction of the youthful Good Shepherd, sitting among snow-white sheep, is placed. The half-circles near the windows are decorated with a large ornamental motif of deer drinking from a spring. Garlands of fruit and leaves wind along the lower arches. On viewing their magnificence one cannot help but think that never has mankind arrived at a more satisfactory solution to the problem of decorating a church wall. Owing to the small size of the mausoleum chapel, the mosaics do not create the impression of vain, cold pomp. The air surrounding the sarcophagus, shining with the blue fire of the mosaics, which once contained the embalmed body of the Empress, is a worthy dream of an ardently religious imagination. Was this not what the artists of stained glass in the Gothic cathedrals strove to achieve, only in a different way?

Marvellous words! But, having pushed my way into the chapel, I can't see anything. Perhaps Muratov's guide illuminated the church with a torch, but now it's simply dark in here, and whatever scant light makes its way through the windows is blocked by tourists' backs. The crowd stands dense and stubborn, elbow to elbow. We need to put some coins into the light box, but no one is in a hurry; everyone is waiting for someone else to do it. I'm in no hurry, either. "I've put coins in many times," my internal voice says. "Let someone else do it this time." A minute passes in the stuffy dark. Another minute. Each of us thinks, I won't give in. The darkness presses on our heads. It smells like mice, mold, and something else, too, something very old—as though time itself had an odor. Then the human smells come through: aging flesh, perfume, breath mints, sweat, tobacco. This is how it will be right after death: there will be the sound of others breathing and sniffling in the dark; heat, anticipation, a subtle hostility toward one's fellow-travellers; a polite decision not to show this hostility; egotism, stubbornness, hope, doubt. The waiting room for Heaven—where else is there to go? "I have never seen anything so sublime (see the other side) in my life! Makes you want to cry!" my father wrote from paradise.

Finally, the familiar click resounds—someone has taken the plunge. The lights come on. For a brief moment, the briefest moment—the eye doesn't have time to take it all in, the eye casts about—the dull, hot darkness overhead becomes a starry sky, a dark-blue cupola with huge, shimmering stars that seem startlingly close. "Ahhhhh!" comes the sound from below, and then the light goes out, and again there's darkness, darker even than before.

AFTER THE DIAGNOSIS

No remembering now
When the apple sapling was blown
Almost out of the ground.
No telling how,
With all the other trees around,
It alone was struck.
It must have been luck,
He thought for years, so close
To the house it grew.
It must have been night.
Change is a thing one sleeps through
When young, and he was young.
If there was a weakness in the earth,
A give he went down on his knees
To find and feel the limits of,
There is no longer.
If there was one random blow from above
The way he's come to know
From years in this place,
The roots were stronger.
Whatever the case,
He has watched this tree survive
Wind ripping at his roof for nights
On end, heats and blights
That left little else alive.
No remembering now . . .
A day's changes mean all to him
And all days come down
To one clear pane
Through which he sees
Among all the other trees
This leaning, clenched, unyielding one
That seems cast
In the form of a blast
That would have killed it,
As if something at the heart of things,
And with the heart of things,
Had willed it.

—*Christian Wiman*

And again the click, and the fantastic, multicolored stars, like spinning Ferris wheels, and that very same "air . . . shining with the blue fire"—a momentary vision—and again gloom. And again the clatter of a falling coin, followed by the click—the glorious vision, don't go, stay with us!—and again the blow of darkness. The sinners stand as though enchanted, their faces lifted. A path has opened in the darkness, a promise has been made, evidence has been presented: all will be saved, no explanations necessary—the magical dark-blue abyss, raised above us by nameless artists, speaks for itself, sings in a wordless language. The blue flows down toward the garlands of fruit and leaves. . . . Everything disappears, but again and again the lights flash on, the fête is endless, and any minute now the angels will begin to sing. Let there be light!

I squeeze carefully through the crowd. I want to see the insatiable being who has mounted these fireworks, who has rolled back the walls of the sepulchre with light.

He sits in a wheelchair, his face lowered. There's a box of coins in his lap. His hand gropes for one and sticks it into the slot, and, while the blue is tinted with lilac and crimson fire, a female guide hurriedly whispers in his ear words that I can't make out, and that, even if I could, I wouldn't understand: I don't know this language.

The man is blind. He has the reserved and patient expression of all blind people; his eyelids are closed, his head bowed, his ear bent toward his companion. What is she to him—daughter, wife, or simply someone hired to accompany him on his travels? He listens to her whisper and occasionally nods his head: yes, yes. He wants to hear more; he puts in coin after coin. He throws coins into the darkness, and from the darkness sounds a voice that tells him, as much as it is possible, about the great comfort of beauty.

He listens his fill, nods, and smiles, then the woman deftly wheels his chair through the crowd and out of the mausoleum. People look at them; he doesn't care, and she's probably used to it. The chair bounces along the cobblestones of the square, affording the blind man a little additional suffering. A light rain drips from the clouds but soon stops.

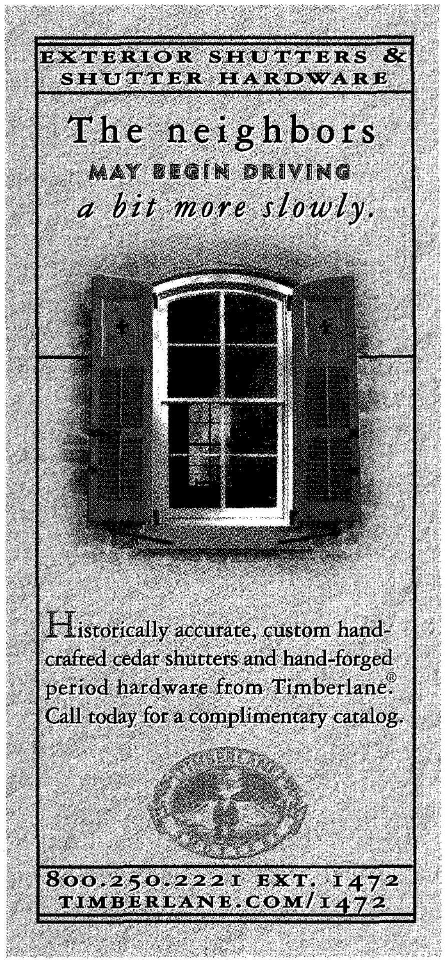
"See the other side." But there's nothing on the other side. On the other side there's only darkness, heat, silence, irritation, doubt, dejection. On the other side there's the depiction, worn with age, of something that was important long, long ago, but not to me. "Makes you want to cry!" Father wrote, forty years ago, of the beauty that struck him then (and perhaps of something greater as well). I want to cry, because he no longer exists, I don't know where he has gone, and all that's left of him is a mountain of papers and this postcard of a green Heaven, which I move from volume to volume like a bookmark.

But maybe that is not the way things are; maybe everything was calculated long ago, a plan laid out that has only now taken effect? An anonymous Byzantine master, inspired by faith, imagined the beauty of the Lord's garden. He expressed it in his language as well as he could; perhaps he was even frustrated that he didn't have the skill to do more. Centuries passed. My father arrived in Ravenna, lifted his head, saw the vision of Eden, bought a cheap little picture of the picture, and sent it to me with love fortified by exclamation points—everyone chooses his own language. And, if he hadn't sent it, I wouldn't have come here. I wouldn't have come to this dark chapel. I wouldn't have encountered the blind man. I wouldn't have seen how, with a wave of his hand, the blue light of Heaven's threshold could flare on the other side of darkness.

Because we are just as blind—no, a thousand times blinder than that old man in the wheelchair. We hear whispers but we plug our ears; we are shown but we turn away. We have no faith: we're afraid to believe, because we're afraid that we'll be deceived. We are certain that we're in the tomb. We are certain that there's nothing in the dark. There can't be anything in the dark.

The blind man and his guide move away down the narrow streets of the small, dead town. The woman pushes the chair and says something, bending down toward the blind man's ear, and no doubt she falters, chooses her words, words that I would never choose. He laughs at something, and she straightens his collar. She adds coins to the box in his lap, then goes into a taverna and brings out a slice of pizza. He eats gratefully, messily, his hands touching the invisible, marvellous food in the darkness. ♦

(*Translated, from the Russian, by Jamey Gambrell.*)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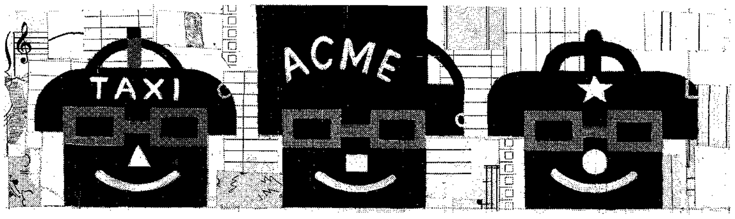


BOOKS

CHAOS UNDER HEAVEN

What was Nixon's trip to China all about?

BY LOUIS MENAND

"The man is unfit to be President," Henry Kissinger said of Richard Nixon during the 1968 Presidential campaign. Kissinger was a protégé and associate of Nelson Rockefeller, Nixon's chief competition for the Republican nomination, and he shared Rockefeller's opinion: that Nixon was an opportunist without vision. Kissinger was also a professor at Harvard, not a place where he was likely to rub up against a Nixon supporter. And he was a Jew. Nixon, of course, was a seething cauldron of *ressentiment*. He hated Harvard professors; he loathed rich East Coast establishment types like Rockefeller; he was suspicious of Jews. He despised these people because he believed that they despised him, but he could never let them alone. They were his motivation, his catnip. Less than three weeks after the election, Nixon put in a call to Kissinger, and when he was sworn into office, in January, 1969, Kissinger was sitting behind him on the platform, the new national-security adviser. Like all foreign-policy realists, Kissinger was drawn to power. For access to it, he could forgive much.

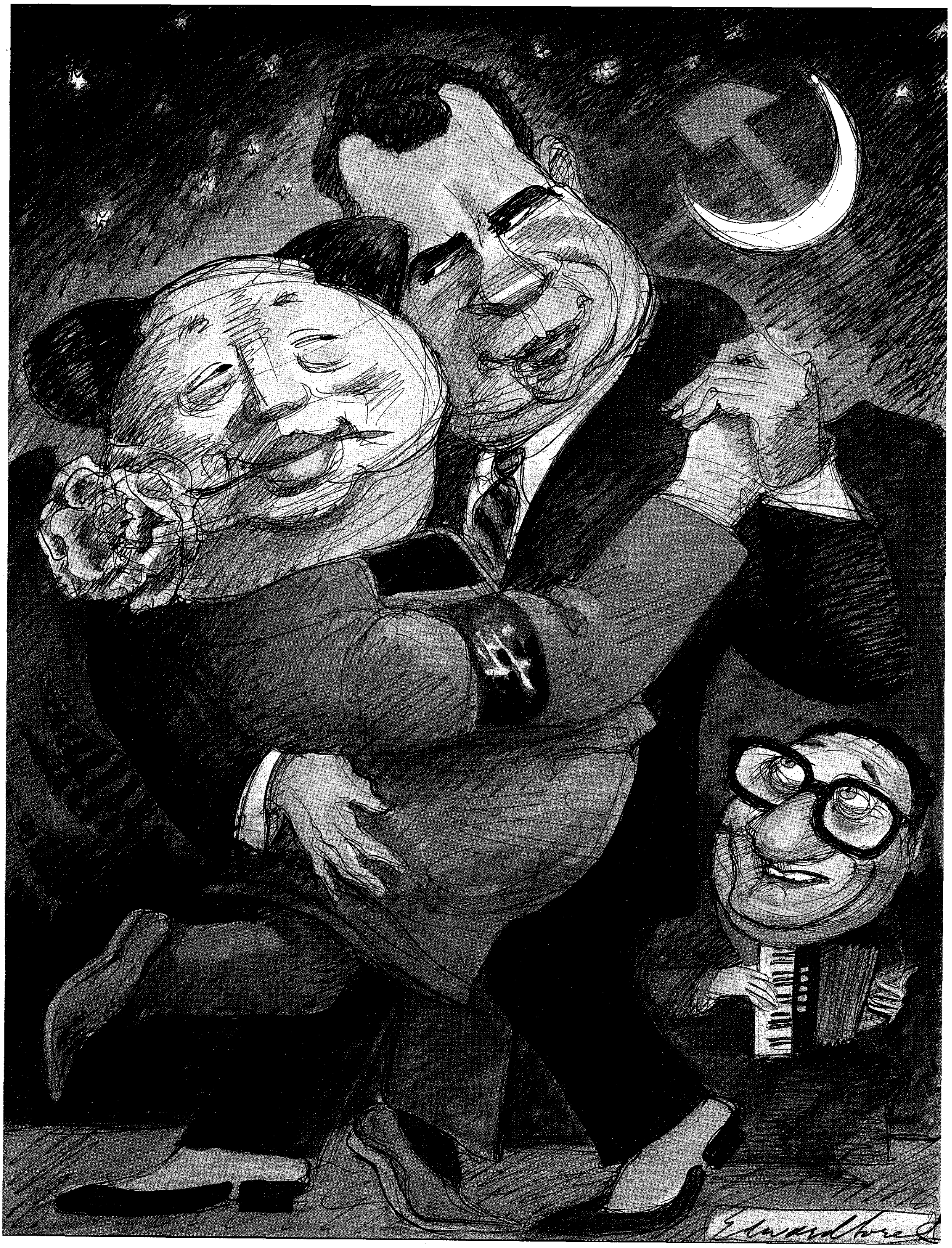
"The care and feeding of Henry was one of the greatest burdens of his presidency," Nixon's speechwriter Raymond Price once said, "but he was worth it." The couple was odd in many dimensions. Kissinger was a ladies' man (or cultivated the reputation); Nixon had trouble opening a bottle of aspirin. Neither took pleasure in sharing credit. Each hoped to use the other to promote his own renown, and each was devious and paranoid enough to find ways of preventing the other from fully succeeding. The geopolitical consequences of their co-dependency will be topics of controversy and debate forever, but one adventure has earned almost universal respect: Nixon's trip to China, in February, 1972, which is the subject of Margaret MacMillan's "Nixon and Mao" (Random House; $27.95).

MacMillan is a diplomatic historian. Her previous book, "Paris 1919," was a revisionist study of the talks that produced the Versailles Treaty, at the end of the First World War. That book was subtitled "Six Months That Changed the World." The subtitle of the new book is "The Week That Changed the World." The phrase is Nixon's own: he used it in his parting toast, in Shanghai. Nixon was certainly entitled to some self-admiration. He had boldly gone where no American politician had ventured since the Communist victory, in 1949; he had dealt with two dangerously unknown quantities, Mao and Chou En-lai, and come out no worse than when he went in; and he felt that he had earned a claim to the title he had long dreamed of—world statesman. Still, it's easier to explain how Woodrow Wilson, Georges Clemenceau, and David Lloyd George (who happens to be Margaret MacMillan's great-grandfather) gave a new shape to part of the planet than it is to elaborate on the difference that the single brief meeting between Nixon and Mao made to the world.

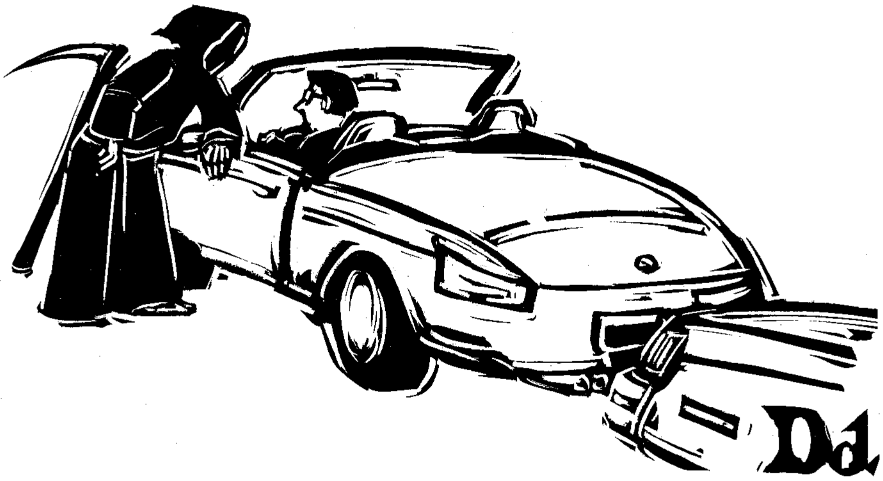
At the time, the visit to China was often compared to the landing on the moon, and subsequent events have not made that comparison less apt. It seemed amazing that the thing could be done at all, and especially by a career anti-Communist like Nixon, but the tangible benefits to humankind were not self-evident. The immediate objectives of the two sides—for the Americans, a peace agreement in Vietnam; for the Chinese, the return of Taiwan to the People's Republic—were not achieved. Nixon and Mao professed to admire one another, and, in many respects, they probably did. They were both natural summiteers. They liked to hold forth on world affairs, about which, leaving the details to their deputies, they took the grand view. Mao "sees strategic concepts with great vision," Nixon told the White House staff after his return. Since little was at stake in their conversation, they were able to be, by their own lights, frank. "I like to deal with rightists," Mao explained. "They say what they really think—not like the leftists, who say one thing and mean another." (Mao found Kissinger unimpressive: "Just a funny little man. He is shuddering all over with nerves every time he comes to see me.") But neither was able to put the relationship to use. Nixon resigned in 1974; Mao, already debilitated when Nixon met him, died two years later.

MacMillan's book is a clearly written, informative, moment-by-moment account of Nixon's visit, set in the context of twentieth-century Sino-American history. The context makes it plain that both governments had excellent reasons for wishing to establish better relations—that by 1972 the "opening" of China was inevitable. China was a weak country. It was by no means a world power, and it had just been ravaged by one of the paroxysms of self-destruction that possess totalitarian regimes, Mao's Cultural Revolution. It had nothing to gain by persisting in its self-imposed isolation and much to hope for from a show of cordial relations with the United States. Although the issues of Taiwan and Vietnam were mutually intractable—China refused to put pressure on North Vietnam to end the war, and the United States could not withdraw all its troops from and support for Taiwan as long as the war was in progress—the United States and China had a shared interest. They wanted to make the Soviet Union nervous. The Soviet Union was a military threat on Chi-

EDWARD SOREL



The United States and China both had excellent reasons for wishing to establish better relations in 1972.



"Do you know why I pulled you over?"

• •

na's northern border; it was also a patron of the North Vietnamese regime. A demonstration of comity between China and the United States was a means of chilling Soviet designs in Asia.

This is why Nixon and Mao chose fanfare over quiet diplomacy—a dramatic meeting between heads of state rather than discussions among lower-level officials. They didn't need to reach agreement in their talks; they only needed everyone to see that they were talking. The year before Nixon's visit, China had been given a seat in the United Nations General Assembly; it had established diplomatic relations with Canada and a number of other countries as well. No one spoke of weeks that changed the world then. The change-the-world rhetoric was Nixon's, and it was aimed at the Kremlin. Nixon wasn't talking about trade agreements or cultural exchanges or improved international understanding. He was talking about the balance of power.

Although the Cold War was on American minds, for the Chinese the rapprochement had a different significance. "There is chaos under heaven," Chou told the Americans at one of the meetings in the Great Hall of the People. He meant that the world was in a turmoil of civil wars and national liberation movements—that regimes were changing and maps were being redrawn everywhere. While Chou and Mao both saw China as the vanguard of these transformations, they understood the transformations not principally in ideological terms, as the triumph of socialism and collectivism over capitalism, but as the crisis and overthrow of European imperialism. The civil strife in China that led to the Communist victory in 1949 was fed by the "century of humiliation" during which China was preyed upon by foreign powers, from Britain to Japan. Isolation was a natural response: China feared foreigners because it had good reasons for fearing foreigners, not because insularity is a feature of the Chinese character. The architect of American Cold War foreign policy, Dean Acheson, understood that the role of the United States in the world after 1945 was largely a result of Great Britain's decline as an imperial power (though he paid too little attention to its effects in Asia). After Acheson, American officials tended to define the American role in terms of the threat of Communism. Communism was a threat, but it was a threat within a greater upheaval. The Cold War was the context for Nixon's visit to China; decolonization was the context for the Cold War.

The claim that Communist states were enemies of imperialism was preposterous, of course. The Soviet Union was nothing if not an empire. And not long after Vietnam was united under Communist rule, in 1975, China invaded Kampuchea (the former Cambodia). Tibet, Manchuria, and Mongolia have been fought over continually. Territorial ambition is not exclusive to capitalist hegemons. Every major power wants hegemony within its own sphere. The policy of Nixon and Kissinger was to maintain the balance.

The idea for the visit was Nixon's. When Kissinger learned of it, in 1969, he thought that the President had lost his mind. But he eventually came to appreciate the geopolitical logic of the move and turned it into a foreign-policy caper worthy of his self-described cowboy persona, making a secret visit (code name: Polo One) to Beijing through Pakistan to meet Chou and test the terrain. Kissinger and Nixon both savored the undercover nature of the business, and even played it up. They kept not only the American Secretary of State, William Rogers, in the dark; they failed to inform their allies, some of whom, particularly Britain and Japan, were angry when they found out. MacMillan says that news of the visit added a new word to the Japanese vocabulary: *shokku*.

MacMillan's account of the Chinese side of the story is good at making clear both the reasonableness of Mao and Chou's position in their discussions with the Americans and the complete moral depravity into which their regime was sunk. It is less good at capturing the special febrility of American social and political life during Nixon's first term. Her book is not organized to create drama—it begins with Nixon's conversation with Mao and then fills in the background stories—and some material gets repeated. Her conclusion that "the China card did not produce as much as the Americans hoped for" is accurate but anticlimactic.

Nixon's difficulties with being in the world were not limited to aspirin bottles. He had a mind-body problem like few other politicians. He was neurotically self-conscious about his affect and his image—he used to scribble reminders to himself to project qualities like coolness, strength, and joy—but the obsession didn't do him much good. From the beginning, his image was his greatest liability as a politician. It wasn't that he failed to project coolness, strength, or joy; it was that he was so obviously *trying* to project them. He came across not as an earnest man thwarted by a recalcitrant physical manner. He came across as a phony. And so, having a keen sense of where his weaknesses lay, he surrounded himself with publicists and ad men. One of these was H. R. Haldeman, the former J. Walter Thompson employee who served as the White House chief of staff until Nixon sacrificed him and his smirking twin John

Ehrlichman to the gods of the Watergate hearings (who were not propitiated). Haldeman scripted the China trip down to the last camera angle, and it was, from a public-relations point of view, a success. MacMillan's chapter on this aspect of the visit is called "Haldeman's Masterpiece."

There were a few missteps, of course. These were the Nixons, not Rogers and Astaire. MacMillan explains that Pat Nixon insisted on wearing a red coat for her arrival, although she had been told that in China only prostitutes wear red. Asked for his thoughts after a tour of the Great Wall of China, Nixon replied, "This is a great wall." Nixon's gifts to his hosts seem strangely chosen for a trans-Pacific trip: two musk oxen, named Milton and Mathilda, and two large California redwoods. Alexander Haig, who had been on one of the advance visits, warned that when Nixon was toasting (and there was a great deal of toasting) he should never actually drink what was in the glass. Nixon was known to get slurry after one drink, and the Chinese toasting libation, mao-tai, was notoriously high-proof. He seems to have fallen off the wagon at one point, and critical observers felt that he obsequiously over-toasted.

The Chinese stage-managed their part of the show, too. MacMillan describes the scene witnessed by the Nixons during a visit to the Ming Tombs: "children, with touches of rouge on their faces, skipping; families dressed in bright new clothes having picnics and listening to revolutionary songs on their transistor radios; groups of friends playing cards, apparently oblivious to the bitter cold." After the Nixons and their entourage departed, a Party official with a large bag went around to collect the transistor radios. Nixon and Kissinger both underwent chopsticks training before they left the United States. MacMillan's surprising report: Nixon became "reasonably adept," but Kissinger was "hopelessly clumsy." Advantage Nixon on that one.

The diplomatic product of the Nixon visit to China, known as the Shanghai Communiqué, reads as a reasonably straightforward presentation of the positions, generally opposed, of the two sides. "The text is surprisingly lively for a diplomatic document," as Nixon put it in his memoirs. MacMillan explains that crafting the text was an ordeal, and that the ones who suffered were Kissinger and Chou and their staffs. Nixon and Mao were presented with drafts and simply signed off on them. Still, when he returned to Washington, Nixon wanted it known that he had been the one responsible for the tone of the communiqué, and he directed Haldeman to inform Kissinger that (in Kissinger's account) Kissinger "would serve the President better by stressing to the press and above all on television the great personal qualities that made the achievements possible." Haldeman gave Kissinger a list of ten such qualities. Kissinger was, predictably, disgusted, and he took some revenge in his memoir "White House Years" (1979). "The conviction that Nixon's standing depended less on his actions than on their presentation was a bane of his Administration," he wrote. "It caused him to seek to embellish his most incontestable achievements, or to look for insurance in the face of even the most overwhelming probability of success. It was the psychological essence of the Watergate debacle."

Still, Nixon's instinct about images was not unsound. In diplomacy, images are weapons. They trigger sentiments and alter minds. One of the treats arranged for the Nixons in China was a gymnastics and table-tennis exhibition. Nixon was fascinated by the show. He recorded his reaction in his diary: "The appearance of both the girls and the men, as well as, of course, up to the superb Ping-Pong event left an impression that was not only lasting, but also foreboding." Years later, he returned to the experience in his memoir, where he wrote about "the awesome sight of the disciplined but wildly—almost fanatically—enthusiastic audience at the gymnastic exhibition in Peking, confirming my belief that we must cultivate China during the next few decades while it is still learning to develop its national strength and potential. Otherwise we will one day be confronted with the most formidable enemy that has ever existed in the history of the world." This was undoubtedly a conclusion that Nixon's hosts hoped he would draw. They wanted more than that, though. In the imagination of the outside world in 1972, China was either a terrifying monolith of world revolution or an insular irrelevance. Mao and Chou wanted to show that they could be taken seriously as statesmen. In Nixon, they found the man to help them, because that's what Nixon wanted for himself. ♦

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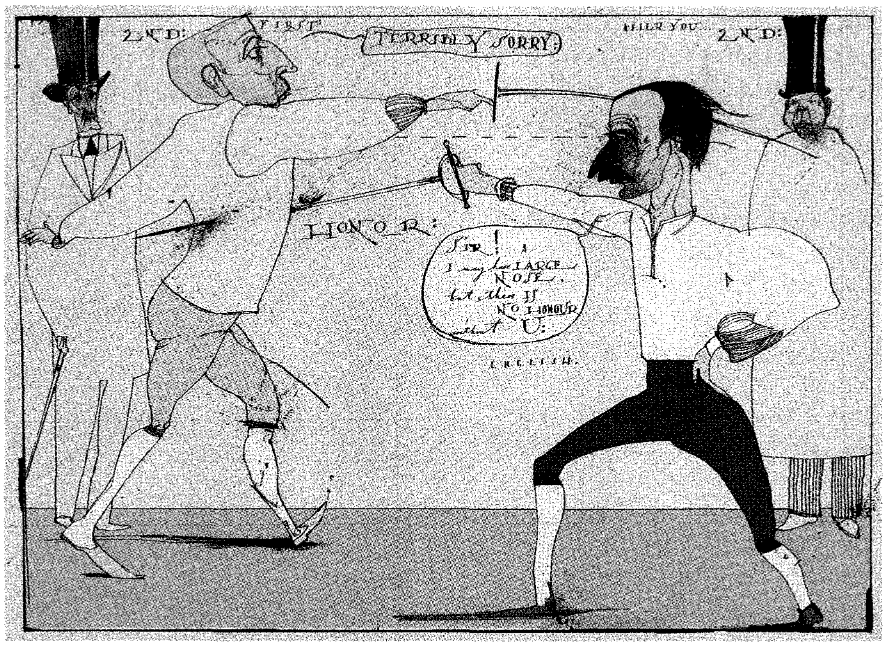
The history of duelling.

BY ARTHUR KRYSTAL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FIRST
TERRIBLY SORRY:
AFTER YOU...
2ND:
HONOR:
SIR! I may have a LARGE NOSE, but there IS NO HONOUR without U:
ENGLISH.

Duelling codes, though intended to curb violence, may only have ritualized it.

DAVID HUGHES

On the night of June 10, 1804, Alexander Hamilton seated himself at his desk in his home in upper Manhattan to finish a letter explaining why the following morning would find him in Weehawken, New Jersey, pointing a flintlock pistol at Vice-President Aaron Burr. He began by listing five moral, religious, and practical objections to duelling, but ruefully concluded, seven paragraphs later, that "what men of the world denominate honor" made it impossible for him to "decline the call." Burr had placed him in an untenable position. If Hamilton ignored the challenge, Burr would "post" him—that is, publish his refusal in the newspapers—and his political career would effectively be ruined. The next morning, Hamilton had himself rowed across the Hudson.

"If we were truly brave, we should not accept a challenge; but we are all cowards," a friend of Hamilton's said after his death. He was thinking not only of Hamilton but of all men in public life whose reputations were at the mercy of political rivals and incendiary journalism. As Joanne B. Freeman makes plain in "Affairs of Honor" (2001), Hamilton and Burr belonged to a class for whom no public offense could go unchallenged even if one felt no personal outrage. Hamilton, too, had issued challenges and seconded other men—one way or another, he had been involved in more than ten "affairs of honor"—while Burr had been party to three duels, including one where he actually took the field. Neither of them was an exception among the Founding Fathers. Button Gwinnet, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, died of wounds received in a duel; and James Monroe refrained from challenging John Adams only because Adams was President at the time. Some years later, Andrew Jackson and Henry Clay took part in duels, and even the young Abraham Lincoln came very close to a sword fight with James Shields, a fellow-Illinoisan who eventually became a Union general.

Duelling is an anachronism, of course. This is true because it may still crop up. In 1954, Ernest Hemingway was challenged to a duel in Cuba, but declined. In 1967, two French politicians literally crossed swords in Neuilly. And four years ago a Peruvian legislator challenged his nation's Vice-President to meet him on a beach near Lima. No one anticipates such shenanigans at Buckingham Palace, but the Queen, as it happens, still retains an official champion who stands ready to challenge anyone who disputes her sovereignty.

This rather daunting fact turns up in James Landale's "The Last Duel: A True Story of Death and Honor" (Canongate; $24). Landale, a correspondent for the BBC, is descended from one of the two men who fought the last recorded fatal duel on Scottish soil. Relying on a trial transcript, newspaper accounts, bank documents, and the correspondence of the duellists, Landale elegantly reconstructs the circumstances that forced his ancestor David Landale, at the mature age of thirty-nine, to challenge his former banker, George Morgan. David Landale, a linen merchant from the coastal town of Kirkcaldy, just north of Edinburgh, was, if anything, more reluctant than Hamilton to pick up a pistol; he didn't even own one. But the code of honor extended to wherever men conducted business, and honor dictated that Landale challenge Morgan. The two met in a field on the morning of August 23, 1826; only one left the spot alive.

The word "duel," most likely an elision of the Latin *duellum* (war between two), entered the English language around the beginning of the seventeenth century. Single combat, of course, is as old as the hills where David slew Goliath, but no laws regulating its conduct existed until the beginning of the sixth century, when King Gundebald of Burgundy decided that irreconcilable differences could be settled through trial by combat. The judicial duel was, as its name implies, a legal practice, conducted before magistrate and public, whereas the duel of honor was private, secular, and, for most of its history, illegal. It emerged as an institution during the Italian Renaissance, when various aristocrats sought, by affecting an exaggerated sense of honor, to establish themselves as a social, as well as a military, class. Dozens of duelling codes, fencing manuals, and treatises on courtesy soon materialized, prescribing the dress, manners, and rules of combat appropriate to the courtier. In effect, they provided the ground on which abstract notions of honor coalesced into the precepts and axioms that enabled a man of the upper class to live a more noble life. Such a man would always keep his word, always rush to the aid of a comrade or a woman in distress, and never allow an insult or injury to himself or his family to go unavenged.

Shaped by the codes duello, the Italian duel was an elaborate performance in which civility and justice played equal parts. A courtier entered into a duel not to kill his opponent but to reëstablish his honor, his sword a symbolic prop until the moment it was drawn. In fact, so long as the *puntiglio d'onore* was observed, the outcome of the duel was irrelevant. As the historian Donald Weinstein has said, "The duel imagined (and avoided) was as real and as serious as the duel fought." A challenge did not always lead to a confrontation. Loopholes and precautions were built into the codes, allowing for a cooling-off period in which the seconds could try to negotiate a peace. The codes also contained detailed instructions for the writing of letters, or cartels, which spelled out the exact nature of the offense and the ways to respond to it. Some Italian gentlemen, apparently, became so fixated on the rules—splitting hairs over some minor point of honor and writing to one another about it—that they never got around to the duel itself.

From Italy, the duel of honor spread to France and then the rest of Europe. Fifty years after Baldassare Castiglione's "Book of the Courtier" (1528) informed men of rank that their "first duty" was to become acquainted with every kind of weapon, the French were making Italians look like stragglers. Not only did the king's minions fillet each other at the drop of a plumed hat; their seconds and thirds often joined in with what the sixteenth-century writer Pierre Brantôme described as "*gaîté de cœur*." Although English gentlemen did not duel with the fervor of their French counterparts, duelling remained a good career move in Britain into the early nineteenth century.

The Irish were redoubtable duellists, but so lacking in decorum when potting each other that, in 1777, delegates from five counties assembled to hammer out the Irish Code Duello. New duelling codes also appeared in France in 1836, in America in 1838, and in Prussia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire around the start of the twentieth century. By then, the German duel had acquired a semi-mythic glow. German students could be found hacking at one another with a *Schläger*, a straight-edged sword whose abbreviated point, while not lethal, inflicted "bragging scars." The student duel, known as *die Mensur*, was an approved pedagogical exercise, a preparatory step toward the all-important duel of honor. Kevin McAleer, the author of "Dueling: The Cult of Honor in Fin-de-Siècle Germany" (1994), contends that duelling was an attempt to recover "an illusory German past in which men of honor righted all manner of wrong with a single stroke of the winking blade." For generations of German plutocrats, duelling was a bastion against weakness, effeminacy, and decadence. Even Theodor Herzl, one of the first advocates of Zionism, couldn't help thinking that "a half dozen duels would very much raise the social position of the Jews."

Although duelling began with the admirable goal of curbing, or at least regulating, impromptu sword fights, it rarely met with official favor. As early as 1480, Isabella of Spain banned it, as did subsequent Spanish, French, German, and English monarchs. The Church consistently condemned it, and, in 1563, the Council of Trent decreed that all duellists were to be excommunicated. Anti-duelling legislation, however, proved remarkably ineffective. Kings were reluctant to punish the wayward nobles who supplied the men for their armies, and the courts were not much better. Despite legal rulings mandating heavy fines, imprisonment, and even execution, tolerance generally prevailed, probably because intolerance wouldn't have made much difference. In a sense, a gentleman duelled to show that he could—to confirm his standing in society and to demonstrate that honor trumped both God and king. Putting an end to the practice would have required not just a ban but the dismantling of the idealistic framework that supported it. After becoming Lord Protector, in 1653, Oliver Cromwell quickly issued a proclamation against duelling, and also—according to Jonathan Swift, who had it on good authority—strongly encouraged his nobles to adopt a rude and jokey familiarity with one another. Phony insults, he hoped, would inure them to real ones.

James Landale seems to have missed Cromwell's cunning little scheme, but he hasn't missed much else. In rounding out his story, he has looked in all the right places and in all the right books, from Andrew Steinmetz's pioneering "The Romance of Duelling in All Times and Countries" (1868) to V. G. Kiernan's magisterial, if somewhat Marxist-tinged, "The Duel in European History" (1986). The duel between David Landale and George Morgan figures in neither of these books, nor does it rate a mention in Robert Baldick's anecdotal standby "The Duel" (1965) or in Barbara Holland's more recent "Gentleman's Blood" (2003). But then Landale and Morgan weren't exactly gallants vying for the same woman. One was a merchant, the other a banker; and the initial cause of dispute was a refusal of credit. Taken aback by Morgan's decision not to honor a bill of exchange, Landale, understandably, took his business elsewhere. Morgan, out of spite, then spread rumors about Landale's financial stability, which prompted Landale to write an indignant letter to the Bank of Scotland. Infuriated, Morgan then went out of his way to provoke a challenge.

Like Hamilton before him, David Landale was maneuvered into a duel by a sensitivity to honor's dictates. Failing to issue a challenge when provoked, according to "The British Code of Duel," of 1824, was as dishonorable as failing to answer one. Nominally, it was Landale's "call," but it was Morgan who, by undermining Landale's reputation—not to mention hitting him with an umbrella—made the duel inevitable. Perhaps the most affecting element of James Landale's "The Last Duel" is its measured account of how peaceable men living ordinary lives, whose worlds were circumscribed by the flow of business transactions and church functions, could be ensnared by the concept of honor and forced into a situation where extreme violence was meted out with extreme politeness.

This was not what the framers of the first duelling codes had intended. They assumed that, by classifying offenses and prescribing appropriate punishments, they would make men think twice about resorting to violence. The duel of

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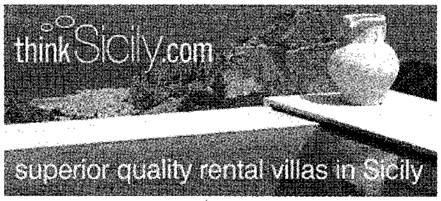
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honor was supposed to cut back on unchecked violence—on the assassinations, vendettas, and unruly affrays (where dozens of men rushed at one another with broadswords and axes) that were rife in the Middle Ages. The gentry, however, took honor so seriously that just about every offense became an offense against honor. Two Englishmen duelled because their dogs had fought. Two Italian gentlemen fell out over the respective merits of Tasso and Ariosto, an argument that ended when one combatant, mortally wounded, admitted that he had not read the poet he was championing. And Byron's great-uncle William, the fifth Baron Byron, killed a man after disagreeing about whose property furnished more game. As for the seconds, whose stated role was to reconcile potential opponents, it's impossible to know how many duels they averted, but a hint may be found in the words of an Italian fencing master: "It is not the sword or the pistol that kills, but the seconds."

Thus, an institution devised as a way of regulating violence became a spur to violence. In France, during the reign of Henry IV, at least four thousand men died in private combat. (One source puts that number at an astonishing ten thousand.) Honor may have been the stated pretext for fighting, but some men, it seemed, just needed the action. Courtiers duelled to show off the *passado* (forward thrust) or *punto reverso* (backhand thrust), or they duelled to impress a princess, eliminate a rival, or curry favor with a higher-up. Instead of arguments leading to a duel, the duel became a reason to have an argument. One French nobleman simply sent a card to his neighbors that read, "I have reduced your house to ashes, ravished your wife, and hanged your children. Your mortal enemy, Lagarde."

If honor made some men touchy, duelling over trifles made honorable men uneasy. Sir Walter Raleigh thought duelling much too serious to be engaged in casually, and, in a single sentence, managed to link honor, reputation, and regard for the duel with concerns about its abuse: "It is an extreme rudeness to tax any man in public with an untruth . . . but all that is rude ought not to be civilized with death." Yet, despite its excesses, the duel remained for centuries a valid means to redress a wrong. For one thing, the sword was quicker and more binding than the gavel—a man who'd been cheated in a business deal might well prefer to issue a challenge than to engage in tedious, convoluted legal proceedings. Then, too, some offenses seemed to cry out for personal attention. "A man may shoot the man who invades his character, as he may shoot him who attempts to break into his house," Samuel Johnson trumpeted.

But, even in those cases where the offense was egregious and retribution automatic, a paradox snaked its way around the duelling codes: by classifying what constituted an offense, they multiplied the opportunities for men to kill each other. So, did the duel check insolence and incivility? Or did it simply give men license to indulge in aggressive behavior? It probably did both—which is why reasonable men both defended and deplored it. Sydney Smith, the nineteenth-century clergyman and wit, summed up the ambivalence: "Duelling, though barbarous in civilized, is a highly civilized institution among barbarous people, and when compared to assassination, is a prodigious victory gained over human passions."

Four hundred years ago, Francis Bacon suggested that duelling would disappear as it made its way down the social ladder. The aristocracy, he told the Star Chamber, would disdain the duel once it was taken up by "Barbers-surgeons and Butchers, and such base mechanicall persons." But the duel didn't die out; only the fashionable duel did. With Europe undergoing continuous wars from 1792 to 1815, armies became self-enclosed societies that increasingly played by their own rules. The British Army, in particular, became home to aristocrats short of money and a middle class that felt shortchanged by not being upper class. The former brought with it the duelling ethos, and the latter bought into it. Newly minted officers immediately began challenging one another in order to gain the honor of having fought a duel.

One beneficiary of rank, James Landale writes, was his ancestor's tormentor George Morgan. In 1812, Morgan had managed to purchase a commission in the 45th Regiment of Foot. He saw action in the Peninsular War in Spain, and, after being demobbed, never let anyone forget the service he'd rendered to His Majesty. In spite of this, David Landale felt obliged to ask his friends whether Morgan was even worthy of a duel. Landale was deceiving himself: the honor at the heart of duelling codes was a matter of indifference to men who used the duel as a step up. Pistols had made fencing lessons and a coat of arms superfluous, and anyone capable of cocking a hammer and pulling a trigger was now fit to duel.

Pistols lowered the tone, not just because of their owners' status but because they didn't shoot straight. They misfired; they exploded in the hand; they killed people standing nearby; and they inspired such quaint variations as the duel *au mouchoir*, in which duellists stood close enough to hold opposite corners of a handkerchief. Eventually, as guns were made safer and more accurate, the pistol duel came to be seen as fairer than a sword fight. The English, however, couldn't resist taking fairness to yet another level: Wouldn't the duel be more sporting if, say, the adversaries didn't actually aim? Perhaps because Landale and Morgan were Scottish, or because the malevolence of one was matched by the grim fatalism of the other, both men sighted down the barrels of their guns and fired simultaneously. For what seemed like ten seconds to one witness, the two men remained standing; then Morgan "gently fell on his right side." He died without uttering a word.

For James Landale, the consternation occasioned by Morgan's death and the ensuing trial of David Landale attest to the waning popularity of the duel. Landale is right to point out that fewer duels were being fought in Britain as the century wore on; nonetheless, there still seemed little reason *not* to duel if one were so inclined. By 1844, Queen Victoria had had enough. At her urging, the articles of war were amended to read that any officer involved in a duel, or with knowledge of one, would be cashiered out of the Army. A year later, Prime Minister Robert Peel (who, earlier in his career, had famously challenged the Irish nationalist Daniel O'Connell) added the clincher: widows of officers killed in a duel would not receive a pension. Moral obligation had shifted from personal honor to communal concern. The duellist came to be viewed as someone who cared more about himself than his family or country, and, for the first time, there existed a manifestly honorable reason not to fight.

Meanwhile—on the Continent and in the American South—men duelled with abandon. The Prussian Law Code of 1794, although it forbade duelling, managed to enhance its social prestige by discriminating among duellists; duels not conducted by officers or the nobility were treated as assault or murder. The Germans then went at it with solemn menace, ceasing only when the kaiser or a superior officer commanded them to. (Apparently, the only thing more dishonorable than not duelling was not following orders.) By the end of the nineteenth century, Germans were fighting fewer duels than the French, but their mortality rate was higher. While a Frenchman still insisted on the right to duel, in many instances a touch on the arm with a sword, or a pistol shot that went noticeably wide, was enough to satisfy honor. The French duel had, in fact, become something of a dog-and-pony show, where onlookers could anticipate a frisson, but not a funeral. Mark Twain, visiting Europe in the eighteen-seventies, reported that during a pistol duel each man's gallery, for its own safety, was positioned directly behind the duellist.

Five hundred years after the formulation of the original honor codes, the duel still engaged men in society, the military, and government. Europeans were duelling after the invention of the telephone, after cars started coming off assembly lines, after Einstein published his special theory of relativity. Despite growing moral disapprobation, men seemed unwilling to give up their duelling privileges; and the anti-duelling leagues that arose toward the end of the nineteenth century only attested to the duel's resilience. Tolstoy underscored its ethical slipperiness when, late in life, he mused that he had "killed men in war, and challenged men to duels in order to kill them . . . yet people saw nothing amiss."

Had Tolstoy, who died in 1910, lived another ten years, he would have seen duelling begin to fade in Europe. It's not that a banner of common sense had unfurled over the Continent but, rather, that the First World War brought about a profound sense of change. The enormous number of deaths, and the appalling waste and devastation, led to an abiding cynicism about the cultural values—including honor—that had characterized the pre-1914 moral landscape. Ideas about de-

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mocratization and modernization may have cast duelling in a slightly ridiculous light, but it was the historical disconnect with the past that firmly relegated the duel to another age and another state of mind. V. G. Kiernan, in his history of the European duel, viewed the First World War as, among other things, "a duel that virtually ended duelling." There was also a more corporeal reason for the decline of the duel: an entire generation of potential duellists in France, Germany, and England—those honor-bound officers who led their men in the trenches—had been all but wiped out.

Perhaps it was inevitable, then, that duelling, which most of Europe and the American South had associated with chivalrous deeds, soon came to represent a long-ago and better world. The Austrian writer Arthur Schnitzler, who had opposed duelling for much of his career, recalled it wistfully in a short story written after the war: "Life was more beautiful, and in any case, offered a nobler vision then." A duel, Schnitzler's narrator concedes, may have been over something trivial, but dying for the "emptiness" of honor was surely preferable to "dying for much less and to no purpose, upon the command or wish of other people." At least those who duelled had "a certain bearing," which the horrors of war had utterly destroyed.

Schnitzler knew that he was addressing a phantom. Life may have seemed more beautiful once, but, in reality, the only thing beautiful about a duel was the spot where it might take place: a leafy glade in the Bois de Boulogne, or a snow-laden field along the Rhine. Duels were a bloody business, often concluding with a piece of sharp steel piercing the body, or a bullet plowing through tissue and bone. Men not killed outright could die in great pain from ruptured organs and suppurating infections. But one can't blame writers for adding to the duel's mystique. The duel, after all, lends itself to drama, character study, suspense, and a heightened dénouement. Sir Walter Scott and Alexandre Dumas père made it a staple of their novels, and memorable duels occur in the work of Maupassant, Pushkin, Conrad, Lermontov, Tolstoy, Chekhov, and Thomas Mann. A duel also makes a great painterly tableau, stark and eerily beautiful, but ritual should not be confused with beauty. The formal nature of the duel may have lent it a patina of civility, but it didn't make duelling any less violent. Good posture only makes you appear taller.

The history of the duel is one of increasingly shabby ironies. Established to help a burgeoning aristocracy distinguish itself from mere soldiery, the duel becomes, at one point, almost completely martial. Zealously guarded by marginalized aristocrats, who saw it as an exclusive right, the duel evolves, with the improvement of sidearms, into a decidedly middle-class pursuit. And, finally, honor itself, once capable of being described as "an instinct of incomparable beauty," is unable to survive the uses to which men had put it. Honor? Honor is the leader of a street gang who won't be dissed; it is a Mafia capo on "The Sopranos" who demands satisfaction when his fat wife is called fat; and, in the ultimate perversion, it is the slogan on the belt buckle of Himmler's S.S. troops—"My Honor Is Loyalty."

Men—especially young men—have always taken each other's measure and got in each other's face. If the Y chromosome chafes at being disrespected and bullied, it probably has little to do with honor and everything to do, according to evolutionary biologists, with atavistic competition for wealth and power and the chance to reproduce. But perhaps we fight, too, because we can't risk being perceived as weak. Whatever else "honor" may be, it is the knowledge that every impertinence carries with it the seed of a greater, more fundamental insult: the suggestion that a person can *get away* with it—which is, after all, where humiliation really begins.

Somewhere in our molecular makeup a sword-bearing protein squalls to have its day. But that doesn't mean we have to listen. Although there are occasions that justify armed combat, a challenge to a duel isn't one of them. Life is short and dangerous enough—why lower the odds of survival, why make existence even more precarious? "My friend, let us speak frankly," Schnitzler wrote, apropos of the duel, "one must be somewhat limited to stare death so calmly in the face." Ultimately, the duel was sustained not by a failure of communication but by a failure of imagination. Our duelling days are over now, but, as we look around, it appears that the collective imagination has still not grasped the prophecy of cut steel, the secret germinating inside the barrel of a gun. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

Remainder, *by Tom McCarthy (Vintage; $13.95)*. After being injured in an accident, the unnamed narrator of this hypnotically creepy novel becomes paralyzed by self-consciousness. Constantly aware of his "awkward, acquired, second-hand" movements, he spends a large settlement he receives for his injuries staging elaborate reënactments of pre-accident moments that he remembers as "fluent and unforced." Marshalling actors and designers, he relives such banal non-events as a snatch of small talk in a hallway. These precise simulations give him an almost erotic "zinging and intensity," impelling him to prolong and refine the sensation through further reënactments. McCarthy's portrait of the pursuit of total control is arresting, and he is alert to the bland amorality that underlies it. Hearing of a crowded plane exploding in midair, the narrator pictures only "a pillow ripping open, its stuffing of feathers rushing outwards."

Lost City Radio, *by Daniel Alarcón (HarperCollins; $24.95)*. This début novel tells the story of Norma, a broadcaster in an unnamed, beleaguered South American country that is clearly modelled on Peru. Norma's weekly radio show seeks to reunite listeners with loved ones who have disappeared in the war between the country's authoritarian government and a guerrilla force known as the Illegitimate Legion. Norma's husband, Rey, is among the missing, and she suspects that he was a member of the rebel group. When an orphan arrives at the radio station from a town near where Rey was last seen, Norma has an opportunity to unravel the truth. The rewards of this trenchant book are to be found not in its unsurprising dénouement but in its vivid portrayal of a country that has "fallen into a nightmare, now horrifying, now comic."

In Spite of the Gods, *by Edward Luce (Doubleday; $26)*. The C.I.A. has projected that India will become, within the decade, the fourth most powerful country in the world. Yet, as Luce writes in this far-reaching study, the Indian government, beset by twenty-four party coalitions, is "fragmented and often incoherent"; fewer than forty million of India's citizens have "formal" employment and pay any income tax; and three hundred million people—more than a quarter of the population—live in poverty. Luce tackles the contradictions of the subcontinent with a mixture of respect, bemusement, and exasperation. His research is formidable: he traverses vast amounts of territory, and supplements personal encounters—he meets corrupt officials, aggrieved diplomats, Hindu-nationalist adherents of "biofuturology"—with exhaustive economic data. The resulting book is stunning in its breadth, and refreshingly free of exoticism.

Toussaint Louverture, *by Madison Smartt Bell (Pantheon; $27)*. The legend of Toussaint Louverture is that of an illiterate slave whose innate military genius enabled the overthrow of the slave system on Saint Domingue, and the rise of the Haitian republic, at the start of the nineteenth century. Bell, who has written a fictional trilogy about the Haitian revolution, reveals a more complex picture: Louverture was a landowner (and slaveowner) most likely freed long before the revolt, and was literate enough to be fond of quoting Machiavelli. Furthermore, he initially sided against the uprising. But he went on to conduct a low-level insurgency effective enough to stall Napoleon's best troops until his capture, by trickery, in 1802. "In overthrowing me," he said as he was shipped to France, "you have only cut down the trunk of the tree of liberty of the Blacks in Saint Domingue: it will spring back from the roots." Haiti achieved independence in 1804, but Louverture didn't live to see it, dying far from home in a cold Alpine prison.

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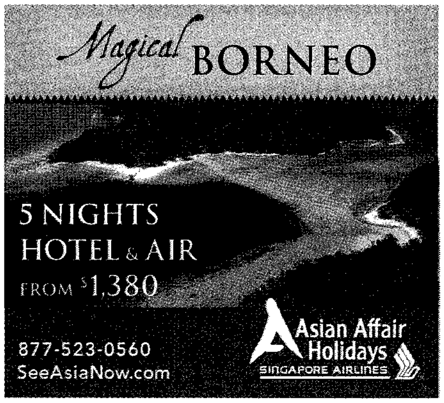

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POP MUSIC

FEAR FACTOR

Fall Out Boy's uneasy relationship with success.

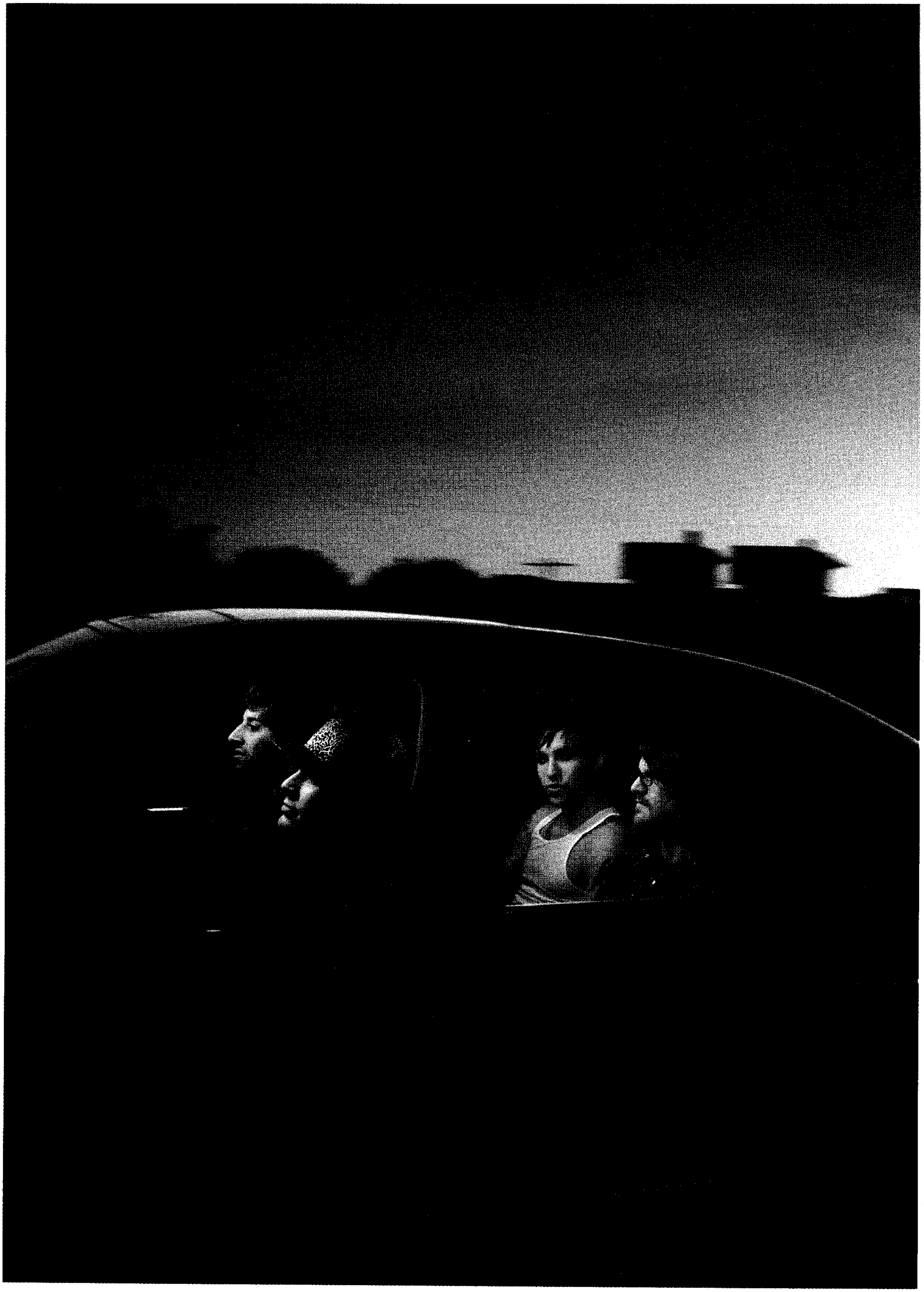
BY SASHA FRERE-JONES

"Infinity on High," the new album by the Illinois rock band Fall Out Boy, débuted at No. 1 four weeks ago and has sold two hundred and sixty thousand copies, according to Nielsen SoundScan. The group's previous album, "From Under the Cork Tree" (2005), has sold 2.5 million copies. Few pop acts are currently selling millions of records, and hard-rock bands, once a staple of the American top ten, rarely figure in the upper reaches of the charts. The fact that Fall Out Boy is popular while playing what is, give or take a dozen influences, traditional guitar rock has to do in part with the band's universally catchy songs and in part with the star power of its eyeliner-wearing bassist and spokesman, Pete Wentz, who is also responsible for the group's exceedingly self-conscious lyrics. (Fall Out Boy is the main topic of Fall Out Boy songs.) The band—in addition to Wentz, it consists of three men in their twenties—is obsessed with being authentic, which, at least according to the group's songs, seems to be at odds with being successful. Fans are apparently familiar with this kind of identity crisis.

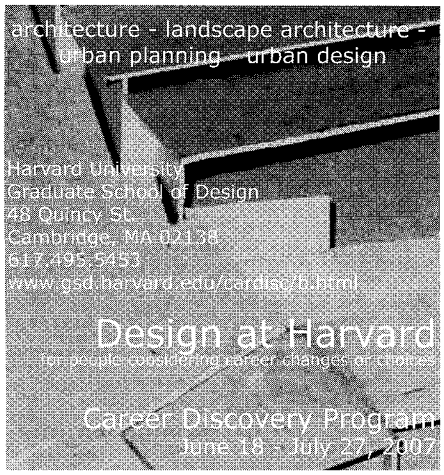
The band started, in 2002, as a fairly unremarkable example of emo—a descendant of punk rock in which political lyrics and noise have been exchanged for plaints about brokenhearted boys and their anonymous girlfriends—and evolved into a famous act that sings about the mechanics of celebrity. The group's second album, "Take This to Your Grave" (2003), appeared on an independent punk-rock label called Fueled by Ramen—the name refers to the marginal existences of touring bands—and the drummer, Andy Hurley, still claims to be a vegan anarchist. ("My whole thing is I'm not into civilization as a whole," he recently told *Rolling Stone*.) "From Under the Cork Tree" and "Infinity on High" were released by a major label, Island Records; the first song on "Infinity" is called "Thriller," after the biggest-selling album of all time. It begins with some cheerleading by the rapper Jay-Z, the C.E.O. of Def Jam, Island's sister label: "We dedicate this album to anybody people said couldn't make it. To the fans that held us down till everybody came around, welcome. It's here."

The album is deeply pleasurable, consisting of compressed, torqued-up rock songs that rarely detour into instrumental passages and return single-mindedly to choruses that range from the reasonably hummable to the eminently hummable. Like the band's other albums, "Infinity" is the product of an atypical division of labor, between the husky blond guitarist and singer Patrick Stump, who composes the rapidly shifting, unabashedly melodic music (he's a fan of soul, and warms up for shows by singing Nat King Cole's version of "Almost Like Being in Love"), and Wentz, whose clever lyrics rely on pop-culture references. ("A Little Less 'Sixteen Candles,' a Little More 'Touch Me' " is the name of a song from "Cork Tree.") Many people who have never heard Fall Out Boy know that Wentz has been romantically linked with starlets like Michelle Trachtenberg and Lindsay Lohan, and that last year nude pictures that Wentz took of himself with his Sidekick made their way onto the Internet. Wentz spends almost as much time online as the band's fans do. As he said in a recent interview, "I blog pretty hard."

On "Infinity," the first lyrics that Stump sings are, well, about Fall Out Boy: "Last summer we took threes across the board, but by fall we were a cover story: 'Now in stores.' Make us poster boys for your scene, but we are not making an acceptance speech." (The only top-ten acts that talk about fame as much as Fall Out Boy does are rappers, although their take on selling records is less conflicted.) Fall Out Boy retains



The band, once an unremarkable example of emo, now sings about the mechanics of celebrity. Photograph by Evan Hurd.



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some formal connections to punk—the generally rapid tempos and distorted guitars will be familiar to anyone who has heard Green Day or Blink-182—but, with a few tweaks, Stump's songs could work perfectly well as country or R. & B. numbers. His vocals are open-throated and powerful, a bit reminiscent of eighties New Wave singers like Howard Jones, though his belting style suggests that of a musical-theatre performer. Wentz's lyrics can be cynical and sour—"We're the new face of failure, prettier and younger but not any better off" is a line from "I'm Like a Lawyer with the Way I'm Always Trying to Get You Off (Me & You)"—but Stump sings them on bended knee, seemingly incapable of insincerity. Reviewers have compared the band to groups as varied as the Backstreet Boys and Kiss, which is a good indication of Fall Out Boy's omnivorous approach. Unlike the Backstreet Boys, Fall Out Boy's members write their own material, and, unlike Kiss, all four musicians are technically expert players. Like both bands, however, Fall Out Boy is determined to be as entertaining as possible. (The songs often sound like epic ballads by Journey.)

The first single on "Infinity," "This Ain't a Scene, It's an Arms Race" (a short title, by Wentz's standards), begins with a flat-footed, synthetic beat that lands somewhere between straight dance music and hip-hop, and could be a parody of both. Stump sings over the beat, "I am an arms dealer, fitting you with weapons in the form of words, and don't really care which side wins, as long as the room keeps singing—that's just the business I'm in, yeah." After a large chorus chants, "This ain't a scene, it's a goddamned arms race," the band kicks into a punk assault, and Stump cries, "I'm a leading man, and the lies I weave are oh so intricate, oh so intricate." Wentz often incorporates film terms into his lyrics; he seems anxious about the fact that being in Fall Out Boy entails performing, as if there were something inherently dishonest in it.

Wentz also seems preoccupied with Fall Out Boy's relationship with its listeners, whom he worries about disappointing. (The band's name, which comes from a comic-book character on "The Simpsons," was suggested by an audience member at one of Fall Out Boy's first shows, after Wentz asked the crowd what the group should be called.) Every time Stump's music surges hopefully upward, Wentz's words pull the song back down, his admissions of untrustworthiness inoculating listeners against the urge to romanticize: "They say I only think in the form of crunching numbers, in hotel rooms collecting Page Six lovers" (from "Thnks fr th Mmrs"). Wentz is emo's Woody Allen, unable to enjoy his increasing fame and determined to lampoon himself before someone else does. "I'm having another episode, I just need a stronger dose" is a line from "7 Minutes in Heaven (Atavan Halen)," from "Cork Tree," which puns on the name of the anti-anxiety medication Ativan.

Wentz's most effective lyrics are also his most ambiguous, songs that could just as easily be about, say, a romantic couple as about Fall Out Boy. The band's breakout hit, "Sugar, We're Goin' Down" (2005), probably still its best song, is ruthlessly economical, charging ahead like a more animated version of a track by U2. "Drop a heart and break a name, we're always sleeping in and sleeping for the wrong team," Stump sings. "We're going down, down in an earlier round, and Sugar, we're going down swinging." He extends the vowel sound of the word "down," enticing listeners to sing along with him, even though they may not be able to parse the rest of the chorus: "I'll be your number one with a bullet, a loaded God complex, cock it, and pull it." Now that Fall Out Boy has gone to No. 1, Wentz may be facing a new kind of anxiety. If success confounds him and makes the band implode, Stump could easily survive by writing big, hopeful hooks for whichever team—likely a less worried one—wants him. ♦

From the Sandpoint (Idaho) Bonner County Daily Bee.

Because of a production room error with new software, Sunday's Daily Bee Page 1 was rife with mistakes. The staff of the Daily Bee sincerely apologies to our readers for the slopiness and we vow to be more diligent in the future.

We are reruning the butchered articles on Page 4 today and have made all the necessary corrections.

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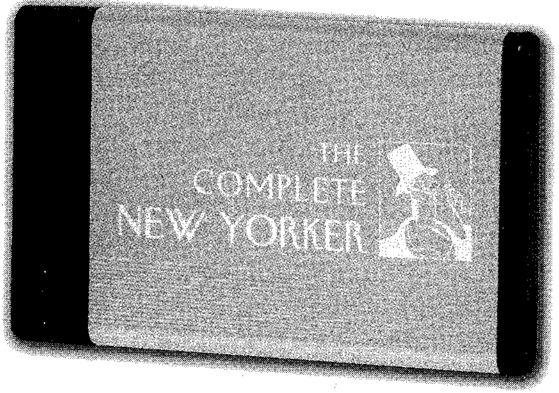

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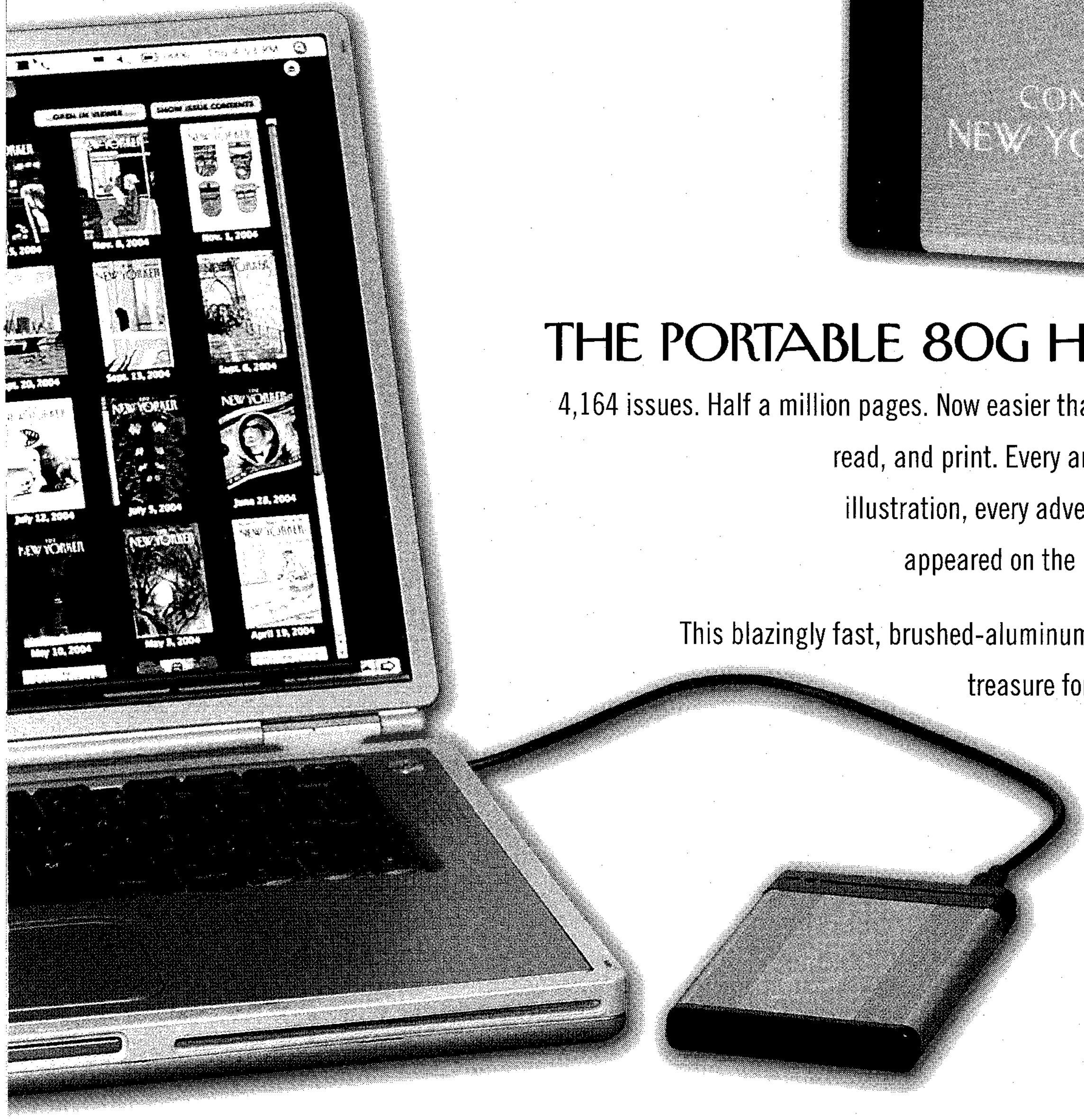

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

DOWN BY THE RIVER

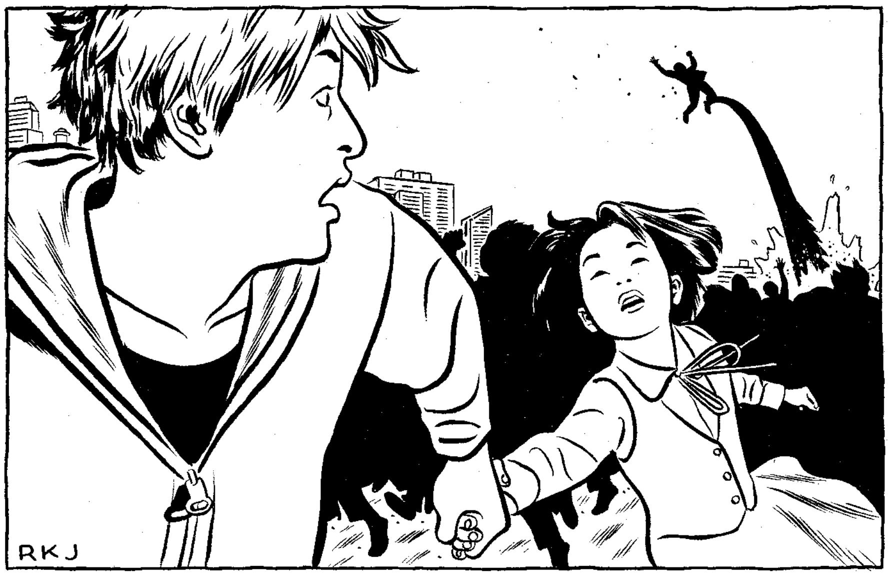
“The Host.”

BY ANTHONY LANE

How come we get so many films about serial killers, teen-age libidos, and the Second World War, but nothing about giant mutant tadpoles? The imbalance has always struck me as unjust, and some of us have considered forming a pressure group to lobby for the inclusion of giant mutant tadpoles in mainstream cinema. Now the pressure is off, thanks to “The Host.” The director is Bong Joon-ho, and the mainstream in question is the Han, which flows through the center of Seoul. The rapid economic advance of South Korea in the nineteen-sixties and seventies is commonly known in the region as “the Miracle on the Han.” Here comes the downturn.

In the opening scene, a load of old formaldehyde, tipped down the drain by a lab technician, ends up in the waters of the Han. A few years later, we see the result, though we can’t quite make out what we are looking at: a dark, bulbous, comma-shaped form, drooping from the struts of a bridge. Slowly, it unfurls, like an Olympic diver, and drops neatly into the water. The good people of Seoul, amused by such novelty, toss beer cans at it and take snapshots on their cell phones. One of them glances sideways, at which point amusement comes to a halt—unlike the beast, which has hopped onto the embankment and is now pounding toward the crowd, plainly in search of a snack to go with the beer. Reading from back to front, we find: a lashing tail, which also functions as a lasso; legs as thick as a dinosaur’s, with claws that can churn up concrete; eyes as dull as glue; and a mouth that seems to *peel* open in many directions at once. The whole package is the size of a Greyhound bus, and extremely vexed about something. It looks like Broderick Crawford crossed with a Venus flytrap.

Observing the monster is Gang-du (Song Kang-ho), a slob who runs a nearby food stand. He has yellow hair, the ability to fall asleep at any time, and—somewhat to our surprise—a young daughter, Hyun-seo (Ko A-sung). She gets caught up in the crowd’s chaotic flight from the monster, which promptly kidnaps her and, in obedience to the rules of fairy tale, bears her off to its lair. The rest of the film charts the efforts of Gang-du, aided by his family, to retrieve his only child from the dripping, bone-strewn sewer where she now resides. The story drags slightly in the middle, but there is no mistaking the rampant acceleration of the final act, in which all those present are called upon to save a life and, in so doing, to fulfill the task for which each of them is essentially equipped. For example, the hero’s sister, Nam-joo (Bae Doo-na), is a professional archer—always handy for those pesky dragon-slaying situations that crop up so often these days. Her other brother, Nam-il (Park Hae-il), spends half the movie complaining that, as a college graduate, he can’t get a job, whereupon, at the climax, he turns into an angry student—preparing Molotov cocktails, like a *soixante-huitard*, and lobbing them at the leathery flanks of his foe.



Song Kang-ho and Ko A-sung flee the monster in a new film from South Korea.

R. KIKUO JOHNSON

No one can claim that we live in a golden age—or a bile-green, suppurating age—of movie monsters, and there will be plenty of filmgoers who yawned through “Godzilla” in 1998 and swore off large amphibians for good. All I can say, to tempt them back, is that I have seen “The Host” twice and have every intention of watching it again. Anyone who has taken the plunge into recent Korean movies (“Lady Vengeance” and “Oldboy,” say) will know that their impact springs not just from the verve of the storytelling but from a tendency to hurtle energetically from one mood to the next, merrily swapping the lyrical for the sadistic. It is as if Korean directors, refusing to observe the niceties of genre, offered value for money by packing several movies into one. The trick with “The Host,” the most successful release in the history of Korean cinema, is therefore to unpack it and inspect the contents.

The first component is shock, without which no monster movie can hope to thrive. “The Host” delivers a fine series of jolts, as the beast, which uses the industrial architecture of Seoul as an acrobat uses the parallel bars, swings suddenly out of the darkness. More unorthodox is the visual gag near the beginning, when Gang-du, fleeing the rampage, takes hold of his daughter’s hand, then loses it in the rush. The screen slows and turns quiet; his hand gropes for hers and finds it again, at which point we pull back to reveal that he has grabbed the *wrong girl.* This is typical of Bong Joon-ho: the setting may be outlandish, but the emotion—every parent's fear—could hardly be more rooted in the real.

Second, there is the yuck factor. "The Host" is not especially bloody, and it will hold limited appeal for those macho viewers who like to test and prove themselves by cackling through a film like "Hostel," which was little better than a dramatized abattoir. Nonetheless, the special effects have an insidious slither of their own. They were created by the Orphanage, the California company that worked on "Hellboy," "Sin City," and recent installments of Harry Potter and "Pirates of the Caribbean." What the wizards have conjured for "The Host," though, takes me back to the heyday of John Carpenter—specifically, to the flowering nastiness of "The Thing." The emphasis is not on weaponry (the best defense turns out to be a metal pole) but on the organic, as befits a beast that was spawned by environmental pollution—watch it regurgitate victims like a mother disgorging fish to its young in "March of the Penguins." At one point, Hyun-seo leaps into the air and stays there. For a few seconds, we don't get it. (Bong likes to prolong the spell.) Then we switch angles, and all becomes clear: the girl is held aloft in the coils of the monster's sticky tail.

Third, Bong, like Carpenter, treats authority with the scorn of the prankster at the back of the class. Anyone in a uniform is fair game. Some guy in a yellow protective suit, seeking to inform the public of what has occurred on the Han, soon gives up and suggests weakly that people watch it on TV. When the girl's family is held in a hospital, following rumors that the beast may be the source—the host—of a menacing virus, we get a delicate probing of the generational split. Gang-du's father is all for mollifying the doctors, trying to slip them a sweetener in cash, whereas the son wants to muscle his way out as fast as possible. This niggle of disrespect lends the film a nervous litheness; we want the monster quelled, and order restored, but what, exactly, is so peaceful about the status quo?

All of which leads to the director's fourth and most unlikely virtue: he makes you laugh. Moreover, he keeps doing so in the wrong—or, at any rate, the least laughable—places. This was demonstrated in his earlier movie "Memories of Murder" (2003), in which detectives and forensic experts arriving to study a corpse kept slipping on an embankment and landing on their behinds, like extras in a Mack Sennett comedy. Many graceful directors—Jacques Tati, obviously, but also Krzysztof Kieslowski—have been drawn to the sheer gracelessness of humanity, as if there were something endearing in our habit of falling (or tumbling) short of that noble dignity which, when sitting comfortably, we like to ascribe to ourselves. The most destabilizing scene in "The Host" comes as Gang-du and the others wail with grief before a photograph of Hyun-seo, whom they believe to be dead, and make such a spectacle of themselves, writhing like eels, that despite ourselves we snicker at their collapse. Such maladroit behavior is unusual in a monster flick, where you expect at least a modicum of cool; you can't really imagine Sigourney Weaver, at the climax of "Aliens," tripping over her own flamethrower.

Given all that, it may seem perverse to hail "The Host" as a thing of beauty, yet that is what it is: a perfect mixture of the silly and the grave. In 1954, the art critic David Sylvester, impatient with the accepted canon, wrote a review of "Them!," in *Encounter*, in which he described it as "a frightening, imaginative, beautifully written B-movie-style SF film about giant ants, exactly the sort of film the professional critics could be guaranteed not to latch on to." Time to make amends. We have shifted from ants to tadpoles ("The Host" could easily have been titled "It!"), but the style is intact. Take the gorgeous wide shot of the Han River, early in the film, with rain gusting across the surface and a hint of something more than murky stirring in its depths. Then leapfrog to the last scene: we are back at Gang-du's food stand, after dark, with adult and child sharing a heaped table of food. On the television, there is news about the beast—a report, voiced by American officials, about the unseemly events in Seoul. The feasters in the shack, who, after all, were principal players in that drama, want nothing more to do with it: "Should we watch something else?" "Let's turn it off. Concentrate on eating." The whole flustered panoply of TV, camera crews, and cell phones that has flashed and clicked throughout the movie is turned off, making way for a glimpse of an older, more peaceable Korea. We move outside for a closing image worthy of Fellini: the small hut, so light and festive within, warmed by the steam of rice, is marooned in a landscape of night and drifting snow. Anything could be out there. ♦

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Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by J. C. Duffy, must be received by Sunday, March 11th. Finalists in the February 19th & 26th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists in this week's contest, in the March 26th issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

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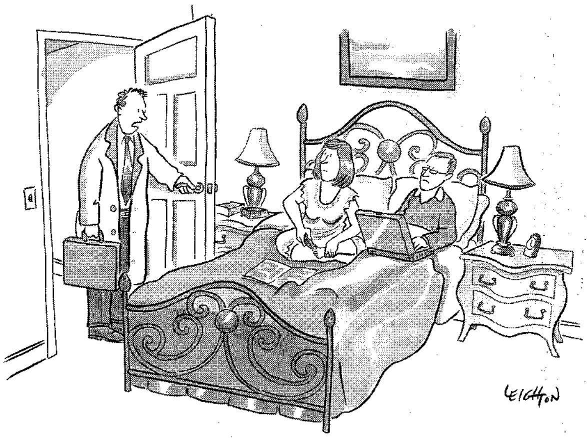
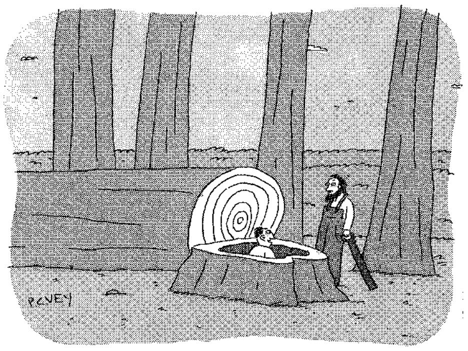


"Interested in a threesome? I'll just sit on the floor and sort tax receipts."
Kathy Kinsner, New York City



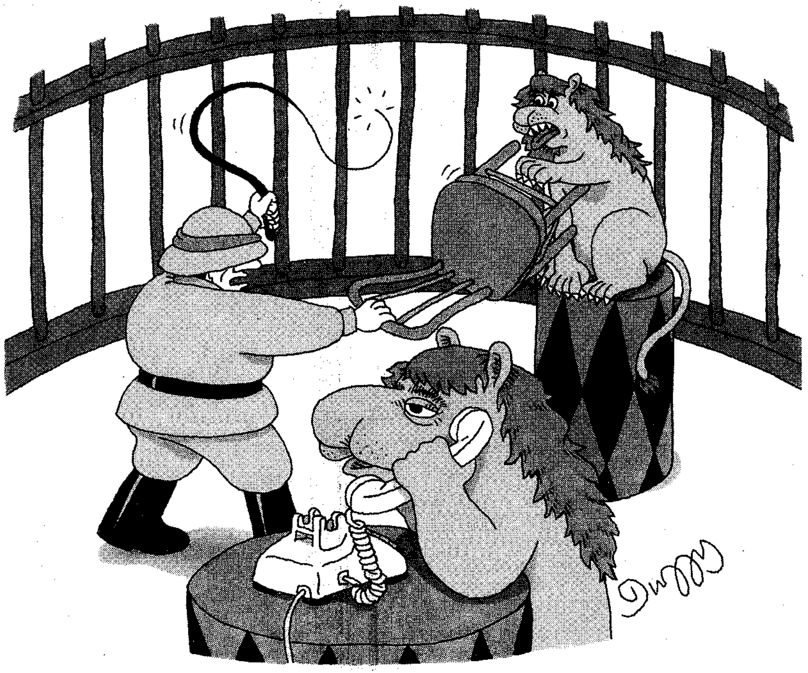
THE FINALISTS

"Next time, just knock."
Sara Curcio, Glastonbury, Conn.

"O.K., now it's your turn to hide."
Jonathan Gottlieb, Santa Monica, Calif.

"Good morning, sir, do you have time to answer just a few short questions for our survey?"
B. L. Delaney, Somerville, Mass.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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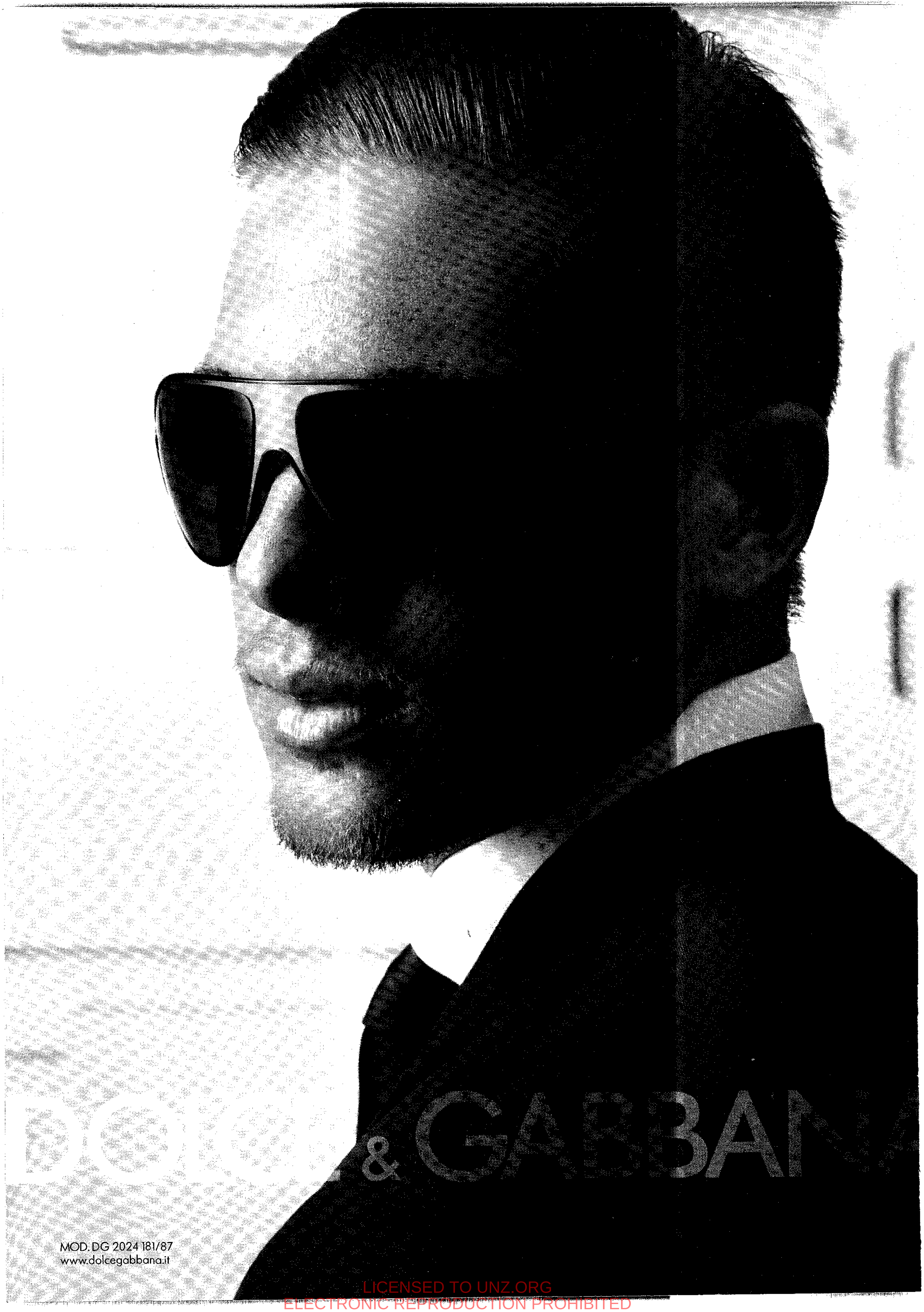
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